

THE REFORMATION OF THE AFRICAN
AMERICAN MALE IN THE CHURCH
COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT

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For some reason, men that attend Sunday morning worship at First African Methodist Episcopal Church, Kansas City, Kansas, are reluctant to become actively involved in any other area of ministry in the church community. The purpose of this project is to intentionally engage the men of this context, which would lead to reforming their participation with other areas in the church community. Qualitative research was the methodology used using assessment questionnaire, surveys, preaching, and focus groups. The result of this attempt has marginally reformed the involvement of men in this context as their participation in church community has slightly increased.

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For acknowledgements, I would first give God all the glory and honor! I am grateful to God for saving me and calling me to the ministry of building the Kingdom of God!

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I thank the members of First African Methodist Episcopal Church in Kansas City, Kansas for your patience with your pastor as I spent time traveling, studying, and writing for school and implementing this project. I could not have done this without your support.

To my Professional and Context Associates, thank you for sharing this experience with me. To my father in ministry, Rev. Norman D. Copeland, thank you sir! To my friends and church members, who prayed for me and encouraged me along that way, thank you! I want to also thank my parents, Willie and Ora Settle, as well as my sister

and brother, Felicia and Stan. Anything I become in life is because I stand on your shoulders! Thank you!

Last but not least, I thank my wife and my children for the sacrifice they have made over the last three years without complaint. To my wife, Rochelle, thank you for believing in me and pushing me beyond what I believed I could accomplish. I cannot express how grateful and thankful I am to God for you! To my children, Jeremiah, Zachary, and Madison, thank you for being patient while your Dad traveled and studied. Love you guys!

INTRODUCTION

Many churches suffer from a lack of men in their congregations where women have outnumbered men in alarming proportions. In spite of this gender gap, men who do attend church are not active in any other activities or ministries of the church community. This project examines men that are currently involved in church by membership but participate in very little else in the church community.

In the book of Genesis, God reaches out to Adam when he is not in his rightful place in relationship with God. God asks, "Adam, where are you?" God asked this question because Adam hid from God after he and Eve ate the fruit they were commanded not to eat. Is it possible that God is still asking this question to the men who attend church on Sunday, but have very little involvement in any other area of the church. This demonstrates a God who is interested in men that would cause God to ask this question when men are not where they are expected regarding their relationship with God.

The study will be conducted with men from First African Methodist Episcopal Church in Kansas City, Kansas. In this setting, I have men who attend worship every Sunday, but are visibly absent from other ministries such as Bible Study, Sunday School, Prayer Meeting, Outreach Ministries, and other various activities. This project will attempt to engage men in this context through preaching and small focus groups in order to bring about reform in the church community.

Chapter One will uncover my spiritual journey and the various events that have ushered me to this context at this stage of my life. The positive impact of men in my life has been crucial to my development. Chapter two will identify scholars, academicians, and theologians who have developed ministries with men and share their approaches with these ministries. Chapter three will examine the biblical, historical, and theological foundations that are critical to the reliability and credibility of this project toward transforming the visibility and increased participation of men in the local church. Chapter four will provide a detailed and systematic uncovering of the methodology of how this project will be conducted, including data collection, data analysis, and participation of context associates. Chapter five will be a discussion of the fieldwork and the result of the data analysis. Finally, chapter six will provide concluding thoughts, a summary of the entire experience, and recommendations for further study.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

My name is Barry Settle, pastor of First African Methodist Episcopal Church in Kansas City, Kansas. My spiritual journey started in San Diego, California, where I was born on October 25, 1966, the youngest of three children to Willie and Ora Settle. My parents moved to San Diego from Memphis, Tennessee after they married in 1955. The family moved to Los Angeles when I was a toddler where I spent the first forty years of my life, until I moved to Kansas City.

Growing up in Los Angeles, I was able to escape the temptations of street life in the community. I grew up on 61st Street with several boys and girls my age. It was on 61st Street, that I developed a lifelong bond and friendship. We grew up playing sports in backyards and in the streets. It was through these relationships that helped me stay away from the temptation of street life in my community. All male children on 61st Street had fathers that lived in their homes and this contributed to me staying out of trouble along with the strong presence of my father and older brother.

As the youngest of three children, I often experienced following leadership under the supervision and direction of my parents or older siblings. My older brother exposed me to his friends; it was this experience that taught me how to following directions from others. When with my peers, I was considered the leader; it became quite natural for me to give directions and lead by example based on exposure through my older brother.

Sports became a burning passion for me; we played football in the streets during football season and baseball during baseball season. We even created various games using the skills of football and baseball. This became a normal part of childhood for me every weekend as well as every day in the summer months. Once I reached junior high school, things changed. I had to adjust to a new world because I did not go to the same school as friends on 61st street. My school was in an environment where I was not comfortable and was forced to make new friends, which was difficult. The adjustment was challenging because no one my age knew me. It also appeared that a lot of children in school were bigger; this was a difficult adjustment, as I did not have the same confidence with the children at school as I did with the children from the neighborhood. It was a time of personal adjustment because confidence among peers from 61st street was replaced by a new surrounding where I was not the leader. This is probably where I developed an introverted personality, or at least this is where it became an active part of my personality. I became a loner, staying pretty much to myself, however, I was accepted by my new peers because of my brother's popularity as a basketball player.

My family attended Angeles Mesa Presbyterian Church. This was the church where I was first introduced to the Christian faith. My remembrance of my activity in this church included attendance in Sunday school and worship every Sunday, youth choir rehearsal as well as Sunday afternoon youth group. It was through youth group that I felt attachment to the fellowship of the church community. I did not understand what it was that sparked my interest in the church, but I definitely liked it.

It was through active participation at Angeles Mesa that I was able to experience my first youth retreat. I attended this retreat with my older brother and a few other

members of the church youth group. This experience proved to help me realize that the presence of God was bigger than I had previously realized. I understood for the first time the reality of God and the impact of God in humanity. I felt, during this retreat, what I understood as God's presence; something I never felt before. It was not an overwhelming experience where I could actually communicate what happened, but awareness that there was something more to God than what I had previously experienced or realized. I realized that God was actively present and somehow making an impact on lives. This was significant for me because it was the first time I was able to understand that God was not limited to the walls called church. Although I still did not completely understand what had happened or how it related to my life, this was definitely the first spiritual experience for me and because of this awareness I became interested in God.

It was after this experience that I began to see other realities of God working, which was mainly through my brother, Stan. After the retreat, I remember Stan going through what appeared to be some sort of spiritual transformation. Because we shared a bedroom growing up together, we spent quite a bit of time together. I witnessed seeing my brother spending a great deal of time praying early in the morning and reading his Bible. I began to search for the Lord following the lead of my brother. What was also significant was the life my brother lived before me. I never experienced or saw my brother engage in drugs or alcohol during his teen and young adult years. This was definitely influential for me, as I transitioned into high school. I was exposed to the lifestyle of drugs and alcohol as many of my friends in school were beginning to engage in this activity.

My brother influenced me to the point of never wanting to let him down. As an older brother, there was an intimidating factor involved, but that was not the driving force behind wanting to be like him. It was perhaps admiration since he was a great example not only to me, but also to his friends on 61st street and at school.

During my early teens, my family decided to remove its membership from Angeles Mesa, after attending for years. I lost contact with friends from Angeles Mesa and was no longer in contact with anyone from that church. After what seemed to be a few years of not attending church, I finally had a conversation with my mother regarding the inability of the family to find a church home, expressing my desire to attend church. It was at this time that our family began attending Holman United Methodist Church where Reverend James Lawson was the Senior Pastor. The Settle family was satisfied with Holman as their new church. It was large enough where there was an active youth and young adult ministry for my siblings and my parents enjoyed the preaching of the pastor. Their family became active within the life of the church at Holman.

High school was better for me than junior high, as physical maturity began to set in. I felt better prepared for this time in life than when I began junior high school. I became more social and popular because of my involvement in sports. In spite of being introverted, I bonded with people during my experience in high school that would remain friends for life. As I approached graduation, there was a great amount of fear and uncertainty regarding my future because there were no plans regarding college or a career path. I was raised since childhood with expectations of attending college, but at that point I did not have any strong knowledge of what I wanted to do with my life. I assumed that I

would follow the path of my father and have a career in Corporate America, but I did not have any aspiration for any particular field.

I applied to a few state colleges in Los Angeles, aspiring to leave Los Angeles. None of the colleges accepted me, primarily due to my GPA and SAT scores. I entered Community College, which is the same option some of my friends chose. It was not a long stay in Community College though before I found myself at California State University Northridge. This was my first experience in any type of real world experience away from home. Although this college was in Los Angeles, I lived on campus and experienced college life. I enjoyed the college experience but my attention was divided, as I entered into a relationship which took my focus off of academics. It was while attending Northridge that I allowed this relationship to interfere with the importance of education and was therefore, placed on academic probation after two semesters. Personally, this was a shock because I never had issues academically, as High School was always pretty easy. I felt it was unnecessary to make any personal adjustments and mistakenly took on a full load of eighteen units the following semester. Unfortunately, I did not make the necessary adjustments to my study habits and once again allowed the personal relationship to dominate my attention, failing to perform academically for the second semester in a row would disqualify me from the university.

This was a very difficult season for me because I felt at the time that disqualification from college was the end of my plans to finish school. I internalized the feelings of shame and failure because I was disappointed with how I handled the situation. I wished I had talked to my father more regarding the struggles balancing life. There is not a specific reason why I did not talk more to my father, because he was

always available for me to talk about anything I experienced in life. I probably did not share my struggles with him because of the embarrassment felt regarding this current situation, which is also why I did not share this experience with family or friends. I did however continue my education without anyone knowing about my academic standing. I made excuses to my parents regarding the sudden difficulties enrolling in classes needed and ended up taking classes at Community College once again. Occasionally, I was able to take a course or two at Northridge, but this was only after all other students had the opportunity to add the classes they needed. This process of taking classes at Community College and enrolling late at Northridge was what I needed to restore my academic confidence.

This academic process was a major adjustment. Academic funding by my parents gave way to being responsible for my own education. At this point I was working part-time at a sporting goods store while taking classes at Community College and Northridge. I could not pay for tuition, books, car payment, insurance and other bills accumulated with a part-time job. This moved me to begin working full-time so I could pay for my education. I worked the traditional nine to five hours while attending college in the evening. This change in life proved to be something I could manage and I did a pretty good job handling the responsibilities of working and school.

It was through this change in life, that I sought a new career. Still not knowing where I was going or what I was going to do, I finally resolved looking for jobs in some sort of financial or analytical field. I began working as an Account Receivables Representative for a Property Management Company. Although I enjoyed working there, I did not stay for more than a year. Knowing there was not a future in this company, I

secured a job in account administration for a malpractice insurance company. This began a long and pretty good career in the field of medical malpractice insurance. I was in my early twenties when I began this job and most of my colleagues in the department were in their mid-forties and older. Once again, I found myself the outcast, as I had very little in common with my colleagues and spent a lot of time isolated and to myself. This was also my first encounter with conflict in the real world, as I seemed to believe my supervisor did not like me and was determined to make my job and life miserable. She was an older woman of Middle Eastern descent. She always found errors in my work and constantly complained that I was not doing a good job. She also was hard on everyone else in the administrative unit, but it was different with me because I was younger and my appearance was different than everyone else. Being African American I wondered if it was a race issue.

The supervisor continued to make life at work problematic as she found fault with everything I did; I felt like quitting. It was through a meeting I had with her right before my annual review that everything changed dramatically. We had a conversation that changed my whole course in that company. It was in this meeting that his supervisor revealed to me that she really wanted to see me succeed in the company. For some reason, that changed my attitude and approach to my job and I realized that I was my biggest problem because I would not focus and wanted to take shortcuts; these things affected my work. I realized my supervisor was not finding mistakes; rather I was making mistakes. I then changed my approach to work and decided that I would excel in everything regarding the job. I became a perfectionist and my work output actually brought a great amount of attention to me and the administrative unit.

It was through this change in my attitude that opportunities opened for me within the company over the next several years. My manager saw something in me and personally exposed me to opportunities within the company that no one else received. I attend management meetings and went on client visits with my manager. It was through this exposure that others within the company began to notice me making it possible for me to advance.

I also had a pretty active social life outside the company, involved in a serious relationship with a young lady, and had a group of friends who was very close. The mixture of these friends was from 61st street, my high school basketball team as well as friends developed through these friends. My social group had a great impact on my life, as they were all professionally and academically driven. They all either had graduated from college or were actively seeking their academic degrees. Those who were not had chosen careers in which they were currently working. Because I associated very closely with this group, it helped me to stay focused on my academic goals, despite the difficulties along the way. By this time, I reached a point in academic life where I was accepted into a four-year college full time. I began attending California State University Los Angeles. I chose to major in Economics, which would basically be the fastest route to reach my goal of receiving my bachelor's degree. This basically was typical of my behavior, choosing the easiest and fastest route to the goal, taking shortcuts. But at this point, I just wanted to finish college. This college was perfect for me because it targeted the full-time working student, so it fit perfectly with my work schedule. I arranged early hours at work that allowed him me to leave in the early afternoon and take late afternoon and early evening classes. By this time, I was twenty-four years old, had learned a great

deal about myself academically, and became more focused in spite working a forty hour week, This helped me understand responsibility in a way that I had not understood before. This period in life settled me down socially and helped me take a closer look at life. Although I had a pretty good job, I did not see insurance in the future, however I was still unaware of the future direction of my career.

Spiritually, I was not consistently active in a worship community. Although my family was still active at Holman United Methodist Church, I became bored at that church. Attendance there became just a routine. Reverend Lawson's sermons were good, but they were out of touch with the culture where I was involved causing my spiritual life to drift. I reached the point where my efforts and diligence were beginning to pay off. There was talk at my job that I would be receiving a promotion to the Marketing Department. I was also approaching graduation, where I was to receive a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Economics. This was an important achievement in my life, as I faced tremendous personal doubt in my ability to obtain this degree. Although I was expecting a promotion and obtaining my degree, I was still unsatisfied with my career and did not know what changes I wanted to make. I allowed the promotion to pacify the fact that I did not have any career aspirations in life; just had a job. I consistently looked for other fields to enter, but there were no positions available that matched my current work experience. I felt stuck in the career of insurance.

My willingness to continue academically would pay off. I reached the point where I completed all the courses required to graduate with a Bachelor of Arts in Economics with a great sense of satisfaction and accomplishment. It was through this affirmation that I explained to my parents the complete story of what had happened with me

academically. I shared my irresponsible approach to academics and my failure to properly balance social life from academic life and how these poor decisions led to my disqualification from college. I shared how disappointed and ashamed I was in myself and how I internalized all of this and did not want to share it because I did not want to disappoint them. I also shared with my parents that I did not want to receive any discouragement and disappointment from them because it was something I could not handle.

I felt the desire to settle down and start a family, as I was in my mid-twenties and was in a steady and committed relationship. I was a recent graduate with a new position in my company. My social life had started to decrease as I became bored with the normal activities of clubs and parties and everything that was involved in that lifestyle. I began to discuss the possibilities of marriage with my current girlfriend of three years. Previous discussions regarding this topic were always positive and we both shared mutual feelings regarding marriage. However it began to appear as if discussion regarding the future of the relationship did more harm than good. There were differences on the immediate and future status of the relationship and these differences created a strain between us. This strain began when she was preparing to move out on her own and expressed the desire to move in together. I was not interested in moving in together until I was married. From my perspective, it was not necessary because we were together basically every day for the entire relationship. Obviously, she did not feel the same. As time went on, we appeared to grow apart, as things began to appear that never did in the past.

She confirmed that she did not want to end the relationship but needed some time. Because of this, I allowed her the time she needed. However, this did not resolve the

issues but made them worse until one morning I received a phone call ending the relationship. The scars from this ran deep with me and I went into depression. I felt all senses of betrayal from her and became very bitter because of all the times I stuck by her. I had trouble sleeping, eating, and functioning. I could not concentrate at work and began drinking excessively. However, in spite of what I was experiencing internally, I had a tremendous amount of support from my friends. They made it their business to check on me. My family was also an incredible support for me. The love from my family was what I needed. Although internally wounded, I managed to pull myself together and move. I moved on with my job and social life, but within pain still existed.

Mel, who lived next door to his parents on 61st street was having some personal difficulties and decided to move. He asked me to consider sharing an apartment. Although this was not in my immediate plans, after consideration I felt this would be a good time to move out as well. We found an apartment on the Westside of Los Angeles, and moved in. This began a two-year transition for me. Mel and I now were sharing an apartment and there was never a dull moment. Life consisted of going to work every day and coming home to a house that was always busy with people coming in and out and parties almost every weekend. Life was pretty good for me externally, but internally I was still unfulfilled and unhappy. I was doing well at work but still not fulfilled. I was enjoying living on my own, but was unhappy with the circumstances regarding my living condition. I was dealing with the internal feelings of rejection, doubt, and bitterness. Even when trying dating again, I was unhappy and did not waste too much time seeking a relationship. Various friends tried setting me up with relationships, but I was really not interested. I just lived life day by day, not really knowing where I was going.

Something was missing from my life and it was not in a relationship. I felt a tremendous void and emptiness in my life and needed to get myself reconnected with a church community. I began to reflect on how I felt and it appeared to be something pulling me back to church. This feeling was experienced at various times over the last eight years but at this time, it appeared to be a stronger feeling. I decided to reconnect with Holman but again found it difficult to relate with worship there. My family was happy that I decided to reconnect with church as they had found their spiritual home at Holman. My attendance there was only out of routine and still felt unfulfilled spiritually; I needed more than what I experienced at Holman.

In a conversation at work about church, an older lady invited me to her church. I told her that he would visit one day, but never really thought about it too much. Finally, I decided to take her up on her offer to visit her church, Ward African Methodist Episcopal Church. I never attended an AME Church and never really paid much attention to denominationalism. The moment I walked in, I found my new spiritual home. The atmosphere was exactly what I was looking for and needed. My only challenge was what I heard from the pulpit, as the pastor's message was not engaging for me and that was important because this is what made me decide to search for another church home. That issue quickly changed due to the system of the African Methodist Episcopal Church because at the next annual conference, Ward was assigned a new pastor and under his leadership, I officially joined Ward. I quickly became active and involved within the life of the church. I was being recruited for various ministries to become involved in. In spite of this, I waited before becoming involved because I wanted to see how things worked in this church before I invested in any particular ministry. During this time, I only attended

weekly worship services. After some time, I was approached to help with the Young People's Department, as they desperately needed male leadership within this ministry. I agreed to assist in this ministry to see if there was a way I could help draw in more young men. It was through this department that I first met Rochelle. It was a casual and informal introduction and there was nothing that really made me think there would be any future relationship between us.

My popularity within the worship community seemed to improve as well. Even though I was still considered introverted, I was invited to several fellowship gatherings. Although I was determined that I was not interested in dating anyone in my new church, that quickly changed. However, none of the dates were serious. I was asked by a brother in Christ to begin attending the new Single's Ministry. Although hesitant, I decided to attend the meetings. The meetings were basically fellowship gatherings without a true spiritual emphasis. The group went from house to house and just discussed topics that were relevant to singleness. It was through one of these home fellowships that I once again ran into Rochelle, who was attending the gathering with her two sisters. It was at this particular meeting where we began communicating which led to a mutual interest in each other. Prior to this, we had not communicated much. She stated she really did not remember meeting me prior to this fellowship and by the end of the gathering, interest was communicated that they would talk again soon. Although this process took a few months to happen, after service on Resurrection Sunday she invited me over for dinner. This is the day we began to see each other on a regular basis. It was not long afterwards we began dating and talking about the possibility of marriage. We spent a great amount of time discussing this matter, as Rochelle had a young son and needed to know where

this relationship was going. I was equally interested in knowing where the relationship was headed as I felt I wasted a lot of time in his previous two relationships and did not want to waste time in another relationship if it was not leading to the possibility of marriage. We began to talk about allowing Christ to lead us in our relationship. We expressed guilt in not trying hard enough to live better lives for Christ; we decided that not only would our lives change, we would hold each other accountable for our walk with Christ.

Life began to change for the better. I found a church home where I was happy with the worship community, my current girlfriend was a member in the same church, and my job was moving in the right direction. I was in a good place and felt an unusual feeling inside regarding my new spiritual place with Christ. One night after having a discussion with Rochelle, I was convicted about the possibility of marriage. I purchased an engagement ring and proposed to her one evening and she accepted. Immediately we began planning for the wedding and we were to be married in September of the same year, 1997.

Shortly after the proposal, we attended the church's annual prayer breakfast. Reverend Cecilia Bryant was the preacher of the breakfast and it was an amazing worship celebration. I dropped Rochelle off at her house and was going to come over later that evening. After an hour or so, Rochelle called me in tears asking if he could come over because she wanted to talk to me about what had happened to her. I came over and she began to tell me how she came home and began reading her Bible, reflecting on the prayer breakfast. She said while she was reading the book of Hebrews, she had an overwhelming experience where she believed God was calling her into ministry. She was

excited about this and wanted to know what I thought about this experience. I shared my excitement with her and said that I would support her regarding ministry. However, as I reflected later, I did not know if I could handle this sudden change to my life and what I thought life would entail. I did not understand what this would mean for our relationship. My thoughts were questions on whether she would become a pastor and if so, how this would impact our relationship. What would I be required to do? How would I fit in all of this? These were a few of several questions I experienced as I sorted these things out. Even more, I also wondered if I could handle it personally.

After spending a week or so praying on this situation, I decided not to end the relationship and support her calling in ministry. We continued the marriage plans as we were approaching our wedding date. During this time, I moved out of my apartment and moved back home with my parents in order to save some money before the wedding. It was strange being home again during this period of life. I realized how much I had taken for granted all the years. The return home changed my attitude and helped me mature. This brief time back home caused me to appreciate my parents and the security they always provided for in life. They were my safety net and I never realized it until this point in life.

One night, I was interrupted once again during the night. Once again, while sleeping I was disturbed in my sleep as I heard someone calling my name. It was the same, familiar voice I had heard previously, but this time, the name called was 'Barry.' He sat straight up in his bed because I knew someone was in my room. I then went to his parent's room because I thought maybe one of my parents called me from my room. Both

parents were sleep. I went back to bed, but could not sleep, as I tried to figure out who called my name.

Rochelle and I were married in September of that year. The wedding was well attended by family and friends and it was a special day for both of us as we began a new life together. I just transferred to another department in my company that also included a good raise, which helped with our new family. That next year in January, Rochelle began her five-year process in ministry with the Board of Examiners in the African Methodist Episcopal Church. As she went through this process, I was thrown into the life of African Methodism. This was a drastic change in life, as my life now revolved around the schedule of the Southern California Annual Conference. There were extra services, meetings and classes that disrupted what I thought married life would contain. Not to mention that I was experiencing many sleepless nights that I could not explain. I figured it was frustration and possibly unhappiness in marriage. I also was being drawn into more responsibilities at church, as my pastor asked me to become involved in various events. While involved in activities in the church, I experienced very positive feedback on my involvement, my efforts drew much attention by my pastor, and others involved in ministry. I began to receive confirmation from my pastor and other seasoned members of the congregation that there was a call on my life. I continued to brush it off and give it no consideration.

Meanwhile, the restless nights continued. Many times my wife would come into the living room in the middle of the night when he woke up and found me reading my Bible or praying. She began to question me regarding my fears and pointed out that I could be running from something. Again, I did not want to consider the fact that God

could be calling me because I did not want to run into ministry just because she was called to ministry. I felt this was her calling, not mine. I never thought about how God called people to ministry and never believed God would call me. I did not know how God would even consider calling someone to serve in the capacity of ministry.

The sleepless nights continued. I could not make sense of what was happening. Finally listening to my wife I set up a meeting with my pastor. He began to explain to me what could be going on in my life over the past year. I remember my pastor just sitting there smiling as I told the story of the voice that woke me from my sleep and the restless nights that occurred over the last several months. My pastor really helped me understand what could be happening and explained how God could possibly be calling and pulling me into another level of service. He encouraged me to go back and pray for clarity on what God wants out of my life and confirmed some gifts. I left with a different perspective on what could be happening in my life. I went into a season of prayer and fasting to seek the will of God. After a season of prayer and fasting, I believed that God was calling me into ministry and I answered my call.

After answering this call, I still did not understand completely what I would do in ministry or how it would impact my life. I wondered how this would affect my relationship with my family and friends. I was very encouraged that my family and friends were supportive of this change in my life. I learned what kind of sacrifice this would be as one of my closest friends from 61st street was getting married and wanted me to be one a groomsmen in his wedding. I was unable to do this because his wedding fell on the same day that I began my five year process in the Board of Examiners in the African Methodist Episcopal Church. This was difficult for me because I wanted to be in

the wedding but I learned through this the sacrifice of what was ahead in ministry. I was also thankful for true friendship because my friend understood and was supportive of my decision.

As I began the process of the Board of Examiners, I had wondered what in the world was I doing in this place. I was not like many of the people in this class, as they were all extroverts, aggressive and very outgoing to say the least. I felt like a fish out of water. I wondered how in the world I would get through five years of this process. I remained reserved but adjusted to life in this process. I remember not feeling adequate enough or outgoing enough to be in ministry and questioned several times if I or God had made a mistake. My wife was a year ahead of me in the Board of Examiners but after we had our son, Zachary, she took a year off from the board. She returned the following year and we were in the same class. This helped both of us through the process as we both were ordained together. In the process of the Board of Examiners, my pastor assigned us to lead the youth and young adult ministry at Ward. This was not involved with the normal Young Peoples Department, but my pastor wanted us to build a youth ministry and we both worked in this ministry and built a very fruitful youth and young adult ministry growing with a great number of young men involved as well.

In the African Methodist Episcopal Church, they have two ordinations. The first is when you are ordained is as a Deacon, the second is an Elder. The Elder is the highest ordination in our church and is normally required to become a pastor. Rochelle chose to pass on her second ordination because she did not have a desire for the pastorate ministry. Although I did not have a desire for the pastorate ministry, I still continued the entire process and received my Elder ordination.

After receiving this Elder's ordination, I wondered what would become of this ministry. I worked closely with the teenaged young men and the men's ministry. I started a Christian Basketball team in the church and entered the young men in tournaments and Christian leagues in Los Angeles. During this time, the attendance of the young men in the life of the church increased dramatically. We had young men not only attending weekly practices, but they attended Bible studies, lock-ins, and worship services on a regular basis. I felt this was what I was called to, to minister to young men, as most of the young men ministered to did not have fathers in their home. I taught men's Bible studies occasionally and was involved in men's ministry while serving within my normal capacity as an Associate Minister at Ward.

I then learned what African Methodism was all about. As our Annual Conference approached, I discovered that the man who was my pastor of ten years and my father in ministry was going to be moved from Ward and made a Presiding Elder. This was a very difficult transition for me because this was the man who counseled me, married me to his wife, baptized my children, and helped my family in every way possible. I remember the last day of that Conference Year, as my pastor preached his last sermon and gave his last benediction. It was difficult for me to accept the fact that I was going to have a new pastor. I remember going over my now former pastor's house after service the next Sunday when we had our new pastor. I remember my former pastor telling me to give the new pastor a chance. So, taking his advice, I decided to give it a chance. The new pastor brought a different perspective to ministry and worship. This was expected, as I realized that every pastor has different gifts. For reasons explained later, this pastor will be referred to as Pastor X.

Professionally, I had changed jobs three times. I stayed at my first job for ten years before moving on and changed four times by the time Pastor X became pastor at Ward. I was still in the insurance industry and still unsatisfied with my career, but I knew that my career was needed to provide for my family so I did what I needed to do to fulfill this responsibility. Although I did not know what would become of ministry, I prayed for God to provide a way for me to work in a ministry capacity while still maintaining my financial responsibility to his family.

After the first week, Pastor X called a meeting with the staff to discuss his approach to ministry and his expectations of his staff. The ministerial staff at Ward had fifteen associates all at various stages in ministry. He stated he would meet with each person one-on-one within the next few weeks. When Pastor X met with me, he revealed that he thought I was probably the most gifted minister on his staff and that he had the most potential out of all of them. I was shocked at this response from my pastor and really did not know how to absorb this information, as this person did not know me at all. Pastor X told me that he was going to be considering adding a full time minister on staff in the next few months and wanted me to consider taking the position. He asked me my current salary at my job to see if they would be able to match that salary. I told him my salary and Pastor X did not see that as an issue. He stated to give him some time to find the right time to make the proposal to the boards at church. He then proceeded to ask me questions regarding the youth ministry and confirmed his support in all ministries for the youth and young adults.

The ministry under Pastor X took off as membership increased both in number of members and financially. Pastor X began a new perspective and approach to worship,

which helped with this process. He traveled a lot which allowed me opportunities to lead in ministry as Pastor X deferred to me many preaching and teaching responsibilities. Eventually, Pastor X assigned me to teach the weekly Bible studies. During this time, I was becoming more frustrated with MY job and did not know if I could continue in this current position and I approached Pastor X about his offer because I wanted to know if this plan was still in the works or should I begin looking for another job. Pastor X assured me that this change would happen soon and he will make the offer to me at that time. Within two months, I was able to resign from my job in Corporate America and accept a new position as the Assistant Pastor at Ward.

This was a good transition for me and my family, as it allowed me to concentrate my efforts in ministry, as he began to transition from youth ministry and begin to focus on young adult ministry, he coordinated with the African American Student Union at the University of Southern California, which was two or three miles from Ward. This new relationship with USC strengthened the presence of young adults at Ward. This transition also allowed more flexibility for me to take care of personal matters with school, as I started taking classes towards a Master of Divinity degree at Fuller Theological Seminary. Finally, the flexibility enabled me to spend more time with my children; I was able to pick them up from school every day, which was important for me during this time. As Ward moved into Annual Conference, everything was going well in the ministry and for me and my family personally. Pastor X was assigned to another year at Ward.

As well as things went that first half year that I served as Assistant Pastor, the next year was just the opposite. There were things regarding Pastor X that was beginning to affect the atmosphere at Ward. Some specifics regarding his lifestyle began to become

an issue with some members and he had spent a lot of time out of the pulpit and away from the church. Often during these times, I was able to gain valuable experience preaching and teaching Bible study. Eventually Pastor X was accused by one of the members of the church for having an inappropriate relationship with her child, who was a minor. This news was devastating not only to me, but to the entire congregation. Pastor X was defrocked and immediately removed from the pulpit. This move administratively split the entire congregation and became a tremendous burden upon me because many of the daily pastoral responsibilities were all of a sudden placed in my lap. Many of the members of the congregation came to me for counsel and to vent their anger and hurt regarding the events that were happening. I felt completely unprepared and unqualified to handle this responsibility, but did the best I could under the circumstances. The presiding Bishop assigned a retired pastor as interim pastor until he could find a replacement for Ward. Two months later, the Bishop assigned Ward with a new pastor to help the church through the healing process as the accusation against Pastor X had become a legal matter, as the mother began legal proceedings to sue the denomination and specifically Pastor X for the misconduct alleged. As Assistant Pastor, I was involved in the legal proceedings as well as a key witness to the affairs that occurred at Ward during the tenure of Pastor X.

As we went into the next year's Annual Conference with our newly appointed pastor of six months, the church was wounded and divided. This would turn to be a major transition in my life, as this conference ended. Bishop John Bryant informed me that he wanted me to take over a pastoral charge in Kansas City. This was a shock to me because I did not know I was being considered for the pastorate. I was not interested in being a pastor and was definitely not interested in moving to Kansas City. I wondered why my

Bishop chose me for this charge because I was not seeking this position. I had not once had a conversation with anyone regarding wanting or desiring to become a pastor, yet alone in Kansas City. Since I was turning forty years old, I felt my opportunity for this passed me by years ago. I remembered Pastor X telling me that I would never become a pastor in the African Methodist Episcopal Church because he entered ministry too late in life and there were others more experienced with their theological degrees that were waiting for opportunities. I knew of others who were more aggressive with extroverted personalities that were dying for the opportunity that I received, but for whatever reason Bishop selected me for the appointment. I found out that my former pastor, who was now Presiding Elder, placed my name before the Bishop and recommended me highly for the opportunity.

In November of 2006, at the Planning Meeting in St. Louis, Missouri, Bishop John Bryant appointed me as the pastor of Willis Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Kansas City, Missouri. This was my first pastoral assignment and I served at Willis Chapel for six years. In 2012 at the seat of the Midwest Annual conference, Bishop Theodore L. Kirkland appointed me to lead the conference and pastor First African Methodist Episcopal Church in Kansas City, Kansas.

Context

First African Methodist Episcopal Church is located in the city of Kansas City, Kansas. It has been in existence for one hundred and fifty-five years.

During the year of 1859, three Black families living in this community banded together to worship God. They were of Methodist and Baptist faith. The families, having felt the pains of slavery, were mindful of the fact that their brothers and sisters were still in bondage. These Christians felt it their right and their duty to establish a place of worship in order to praise God and pray for the deliverance of

their people who were still in bondage. These two congregations worshipped together until 1862. In 1863, the Methodist who worshiped in the German language gave a plot of land to the “Colored People” of the same faith. The members of the congregation made the plot of land a place of habitation. They erected a temporary church of brush and made seats of logs. In 1868 the congregation cleared more of the land and built a church of cottonwood. Two carpenters of the congregation built the church and also the furniture. In May, 1864, Jabez P. Campbell was made Bishop and sent to preside over the Fourth District and sent Reverend Schyler Washington to take charge of this mission. The name was changed to St. James African Methodist Episcopal Church. Years later the name was changed to First African Methodist Episcopal Church.¹

The church is located in Wyandotte County. According to the 2010 U.S. Census Bureau, the population in Wyandotte County is 157,505. In Wyandotte County, 67.6% of the population is white and 25.1% of the population is Black. Comparing this data with the state of Kansas, the population in the state is 2,853,118. In Kansas, 87.4% of the population is white and 6.1% of the population is Black. The female population in Wyandotte County according to the same research is 50.6% and for the state of Kansas it is 50.3%.²

Within Wyandotte County, the church is located in the 66101 zip code area. According to the 2010 Census Demographics, the population within the 66101 zip code area is 13,220. The Black Population is 4,744 which is 35.9 percent of the total population in 66101 and the White Population is 5,187 which is 39.2 percent of the population total in this zip code.³

When examining the median household income 2008-2012 and comparing Wyandotte County with the state of Kansas, we will find the median household income is

¹First African Methodist Episcopal Church document in church files.

² United States Census Bureau, “State & County QuickFacts,” accessed January 15, 2013 <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/20/20209.html>.

³Zip-Codes.com, “ZIP Code List & Demographics Database Download: Digital ZIP Code Database & Maps,” accessed January 15, 2013, <http://www.zip-codes.com/zip-code/66101/zip-code-66101.asp>.

\$39,163 in Wyandotte County and \$51,273 in the state of Kansas, all according to the U.S. Census Bureau.⁴ Comparing those figures from Wyandotte County and Kansas to the zip code where First African Methodist Episcopal Church is located, the average income per household in the 66101 zip code area is \$22,644.⁵

If we compare the crime within this area, according to the Crime Risk Index, with 100 equaling the National Average, the Total Crime Risk of Kansas City in the 66101 zip code area is 393, compared to the Total Crime Risk of Kansas is 116. The Murder Risk is 492 in the 66101 zip code area and for Kansas it is 88.⁶

Within the context of this local setting, I enter this church being the fifth pastor in the last ten years. The members have expressed their concern wishing they could have a pastor stay for a long tenure as it was in the past when the church thrived in the community. This church is the lead church in the Midwest Annual Conference, but membership has declined over the last ten years, where members have left and have yet to return. Attempts have been made to contact old members and a few have returned; am currently the church is focusing on the members we have and attempting to secure new members. The building where worship is held is very old and poorly maintained, built in the early 1900s. There is major work that is needed in the physical structure and many members have expressed interest in finding another location for worship because the church cannot continue to spend the money to maintain the repairs that occur every year.

⁴United States Census Bureau, "State & County QuickFacts," accessed January 25, 2013 <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/20/20209.html>.

⁵Zip-Codes.com, "ZIP Code List & Demographics Database Download: Digital ZIP Code Database & Maps," accessed January 25, 2013, <http://www.zip-codes.com/zip-code/66101/zip-code-66101.asp>.

⁶CLRsearch.com, "Kansas City, KS 66101, Crime Rate Indexes," accessed January 27, 2013.

The worship environment at First Church has struggled to embrace the pastor's direction regarding worship thus far. This is a very traditional church with the majority of members being seniors and cherishing the strict tradition of African Methodism. Although tradition is appreciated, there must be flexibility regarding the worship setting. The congregation has a limited number of members under the age of forty, the worship setting is important in gaining younger members. The past year in ministry at First Church has been focused on developing a strong worship environment. This has been a slow but gradual process due to heavy tradition and the resistance to change in the worship setting within African Methodism; however we have found a good place of compromise in style of worship.

The church is located close to downtown Kansas City in an area that in the past was very well populated, however, there are churches and many small businesses in the area such as banks, restaurants and automobile repair companies. There is a Hilton Garden Inn Hotel, Kansas City Police Station, as well as City Hall in the immediate area. There are also at least ten other churches within a five-mile radius from First African Methodist Episcopal Church.

There are various industries and activities that dominate the community to include headquarters of Hallmark and Sprint/Nextel. A great number of members have either worked in the past or are currently working at one of these companies. Sports also dominate this community; both college and professional. Many within the Kansas City area are passionate fans of either Kansas University, Missouri University or Kansas State for both football and basketball. The majority of members support Kansas University since the church sits on the Kansas side of the state line. The rivals of the college teams

in the city are healthy as many in the community enjoy the sports interaction. Then there are the professional teams; the Kansas City Chiefs and Kansas City Royals. The Chiefs are the major team that most love in this city, even in spite of having a losing reputation. Over the past two seasons, the city has responded tremendously to the Chiefs being able to produce some winning seasons. Similarly, there is just as much support in Kansas City for the Royals even though they have not had a winning season for several years. Other attractions in the community are the Kansas City Jazz District, which is in the heart of the African American community where many gather for dinner and entertainment. The Negro Baseball Hall of Fame is also located within the area of the city. Kansas City also has a number of Casinos, which attracts many people of the community.

Synergy

After spending time reflecting and reviewing my life through the spiritual autobiography, there is a pattern of consistency that is illustrated throughout my life. This is the consistent presence of positive male leadership in my life. This was evident through the direct and personal impact from my father and older brother. There was a male presence of the fathers of friends that grew up with me as well. This presence was very significant and made an impact in my life. It was through these influences that I learned responsibility. I learned responsibility within the context of family, career and personal. This influence was my training ground during my childhood for manhood. One of the advantages I had regarding my relationship with my older brother was I was able to not only observe his successes in life, but also his failures. I probably learned more through observing the times when he failed at certain things, than I did observing his successes.

Not only did my father and brother provide the presence of positive male leadership in my life, but also benefited from growing up with friends who all had the presence of male leadership in their lives. As I grew up, six friends had father in the home and I interacted with them regularly. Their behavior as men duplicated the same example that my father and brother set in my presence. This confirmed my identity and journey towards manhood. In addition, there were numerous coaches I was exposed to while playing sports as well as teachers that further confirmed this pattern.

Reflecting further on my autobiography, it is apparent that Pastor X, the pastor who was charged with inappropriate relationship with a minor, appeared to target the children who did not have a father or male presence in the house. This appears to suggest that the lack of any male in the home made these young men vulnerable. This leads me to consider the vulnerability of young men and women when there is no male present in their lives. Considering the experience with positive males in my life, I feel called to reform men in the church community who are not currently active. My membership at First African Methodist Episcopal Church totals 151 members. The men within that number are forty-eight members, which is approximately 32 percent of the population.

Reviewing this information leads to examining the presence of male leadership within the context of our local churches. Because constant presence of positive male leadership within my life directly impacted me in a positive way, I am called to become the presence of positive, Christ centered, male leader within my context. I feel led to lead the church community and directly engaging men through ministries and worship by reforming them to become active members of the congregation. The issue lies with getting men back into the local church. David Murrow would suggest that our local

church culture has done a tremendous job running men away from church instead of encouraging them to come to the church.⁷ This has damaged the effectiveness of the church family because it excludes men and accepts that they are and will remain absent, which will then exclude the influence of men within the context of the local church. Without this influence, it damages the development of our younger generation because young men do not know what it is to become a man, and young women will not understand what to expect or look for in men.

This ministry project will attempt to specifically target men who are currently officially members of the local church. My local church has forty-eight men who are members but only sixteen of them are involved in any sort of activities within the church community. I will attempt to increase the participation of men active in the community, which will make the church more attractive to other men who may not attend church, which could cause church growth. This project seeks to reform men to the community so that God can develop them into the men that God desires.

⁷David Murrow, *Why Men Hate Going To Church* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books), 7.

CHAPTER TWO

STATE OF THE ART IN THIS MINISTRY FOCUS

Analysis of data from the United States Religious Landscape Survey conducted by the Pew Research Center's Form on Religion and Public Life have discovered through their research that women are more religious than men on a variety of measures. The percentage of women and men who:

- Are affiliated with a religion—Women: 86 percent; Men 79 percent.
- Have absolutely certain belief in God or a universal spirit—Women: 77 percent; Men 65 percent.
- Pray at least daily—Women: 66 percent; Men: 49 percent.
- Say religion is very important in their lives—Women: 63 percent; Men: 49 percent.
- Have absolutely certain belief in a personal God—Women: 58 percent; Men: 45 percent.
- Attend worship services at least weekly—Women: 44 percent; Men: 34 percent.¹

This data is consistent with many different resources, which reveal an overwhelming trend the life of our Christian churches. Depending on various population groups selected within this country the data varies. However, in spite of the data ranges statistically, one thing common among all resources is that overall, women outnumber men in our local churches and in most activities within these church communities.

¹*The Stronger Sex: Spiritually Speaking* Accessed May 27, 2014 <http://www.pewforum.org/2009/02/26/the-stronger-sex-spiritually-speaking/>.

Resources written by Jawanza Kunjufu, David Murrow, Leon Podles, Eric Mason, and others all support the reality of the pews on Sunday morning and the overall community is absent of a male majority. However, even though the majority of those who are active in churches are women, men still do attend, however in the minority. Yet in spite of this reality, not much information has been developed to correct the community of our churches. Eric Mason says, “We don’t have enough material written on manhood. I base that on the fact that our gender continues to be steeped in a crisis of identity. We are deeply deficient in understanding and practicing how to relate to God and others in a healthy way.”² The writer wants to examine effective strategies on connecting with the men who are attending church, even though they are in the minority. He believes this needs deliberate focus and attention, in order to initiate reform.

The definition of reform is to improve someone or something, by removing or correcting faults and problems.³ If the reality of the population of women being greater than the population of men is to experience reform, attention must be directed towards the men who are attending, not on the men who are not there. To ignore the men who do attend church, we affirm the current condition of the church community. The community consists of those who believe and put their trust in Jesus Christ. This establishes the community.⁴

Unless there is deliberate and specific attention towards all members of the community, this communicates an unwritten message that the church accepts men who

²Eric Mason, *Manhood Restored: How the Gospel Makes Men Whole* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2013), 1.

³*Merriam Webster*, accessed June 3, 2014, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/reform>.

⁴Roy B. Zuck, *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, electronic ed. (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1994), 55.

attend on Sunday morning, but are absent in the majority of other areas in the life of the church community. If there a reform in the church culture appears it is hopeful that this will lead to an overall change in our churches that include men in all aspects of the community. David Murrow in his work, *Why Men Hate Going to Church*, suggests that if the church is thriving, there are men in the church community that are true followers of Christ. Those churches that are the most successful at reaching men are the ones that are growing faster than many other congregations.⁵ Murrow continues that churches should model the Jesus' approach to ministry, as this approach was directed towards men first. His focus was that if we desire to change the culture of our churches, we must focus on men. Not to the exclusion of women and children—however, the spiritual development of men must become our top priority.⁶

Here is an oft-quoted statistic in men's ministry circles: when a mother comes to faith in Christ, the rest of her family follows 17 percent of the time. But when a father comes to faith in Christ, the rest of the family follows 93 percent of the time.⁷ This is the same statistic that my former pastor Reverend C. Dennis Williams would share with the ministerial staff at my former church, as we prepared for men's ministry. He taught that if we can bring men to Christ, their families will follow and the church membership would grow.

Leon Podles, in his book, *The Church Impotent*, cites that the gender gap of women to men is especially severe in Black churches, whether established or storefront.

⁵David Murrow, *Why Men Hate Going to Church* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2005), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 8-9.

⁶Ibid., 43.

⁷Ibid., 48.

Although men have predominantly served clergy functions, the pews are overwhelmingly women. This impact is felt within the Black community as well. In the efforts of the Black church regarding civil rights and the plight of minorities, the Black church has quietly ignored black men.⁸ This is a problem in the African American church, this problem also exist with many non-African American churches as well. Reverend Dr. Mark Holland, pastor of Trinity Community Church, A United Methodist Congregation and with Pastor Chris Pinon, pastor of Life Way Church; both pastors and their congregations are non-African American and they both indicated that their church communities share the same gender gaps.

One view purports that our church communities have become feminized as the main focus is geared towards women. Leon Podles sites Nietzsche, who saw a contradiction between the Christian and the masculine stating, “Christianity is a religion for slaves, weaklings, the effeminate, a sacrifice of all freedom, all pride, all self-confidence of the spirit; at the same time, enslavement and self mockery, self mutilation. Christianity denies the will to power, so it cannot be masculine. A man must therefore choose between being masculine and Christian; he cannot be both.”⁹ However, Podles continues, “Seeing an eternal animosity between masculinity and Christianity cannot account for Judaism and Islam, or for the first millennium of Christianity, the age of the Church Fathers, in which there is no evidence of a substantial disparity in religious practice between men and women.”¹⁰

⁸Leon Podles, *The Church Impotent: The Feminization of Christianity* (Dallas, TX: Spence Publishing Company, 1999), xvi.

⁹Ibid., 35-36.

¹⁰Ibid, 36.

Gordon Dalbey states that national parish consultant Dr. Lyly Schaller, in a briefing of United Methodist leaders declared that the changing trend that most concerns him is the feminization of the church in almost all denominations, disturbed that “nobody is taking this seriously or attempting to find out why this is happening,” Schaller challenged denominational leaders with the question, “where are all the men.”¹¹ Schaller notes the following information:

In the first parish where he served, records showed 63 percent of the active membership were women. Among those who were married, a full 25 percent worshiped without their husband, who either never joined the church or chose after joining not to participate. In activities that directly reflect the ongoing life of the church—prayer, fellowship, and ministry to the community, the gender gap was greater. Weekday Morning Prayer and study group drew women only. Lunchtime group, scheduled to accommodate working persons, was all women. The after-worship time of prayer and sharing drew as many as ten women, but never more than two men. Ministries that reached out to local nursing homes and drug rehabilitation clinic drew only one male in each. The absence of men in these activities was not for lack of invitation or encouragement from either the pastor or others.¹²

Dalbey continues in an interview with Dr. Donald M. Joy of Asbury Theological Seminary entitled, “Is the Church Feminized,” Joy emphasized that because so many fathers are emotionally absent from their sons, the deformed male is emerging as the norm in our society, and the tough macho image is designed to compensate for this insecurity, and it becomes not macho to be in church.¹³ The church has not attempted to portray Christ centered character from a masculine perspective. The church stresses weakness and tenderness and these traits are not attractive and acceptable to men. The church should attempt to portray the manly strength and firmness that God provides for us and demonstrate that weakness, confessed and submitted to God through Jesus Christ

¹¹Gordon Dalbey, *Healing the Masculine Soul: How God Restores Men to Real Manhood* (Nashville, TN: W Publishing Group, 2003), 186.

¹²*Ibid.*, 187.

¹³*Ibid.*, 190.

will ultimately bring the masculine strength that men desire.¹⁴ Finally, Dalbey states, “The work of God among men today—and so, the work of the church—is not to feminize our masculinity, but to redeem it; not to make men more like women, but to make us more authentic men.”¹⁵ This effort must be made by prioritizing efforts to form communities, which men are comfortable being themselves. The environment should be safe, where men may behave within their natural personality without the threat of crossing any religious restrictions, which may be present within the local church community.

David Murrow cited a study from Dr. Woody Davis, who “conducted a series of focus groups to identify the primary themes of the Christian faith.” The ten most mentioned responses all came from American culture’s feminine set, including such themes as support, nurture, humility, and dependence. This supports the argument that to be a Christian is to embrace feminine values.

Again, supporting previous views from Dalbey on making authentic men within the church community, this is completed by the encounter with Jesus Christ. Men must have a true encounter with Jesus through the Good News. Men, who just attend church, lack this encounter and continue in the mediocrity of their disinterest in the life of the church community. This lack of a true encounter with Christ causes separation from God, and this state is so embedded within men in the church, that this dysfunction becomes the new normal for the church.¹⁶ The dysfunction has existed so long that reform could take

¹⁴Ibid., 192.

¹⁵Ibid., 193.

¹⁶Eric Mason, *Manhood Restored: How the Gospel Makes Men Whole* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2013), 15.

just as long, if not longer. Within my church community, men often discuss programs that existed many years ago that kept men active in the community. However, these programs proved to be unable to stay long term, and because of this, many men who were involved in these programs have left the church community all together. This supports Mason's view that solutions to involve men within the community like self-help, community programming and training groups all have their place, but it is not the foundation that will keep men active. These types of programs only help to aid in the reform, but they are not the foundation. The church needs something deeper than programs to involve men in the community. Men need to be born again!¹⁷ Jesus is the means that will reform and restore men in the church community.¹⁸

Mason continues, "The church is still primarily built on engaging issues that are more pertinent to women. Somewhere along the line, recognized in the church—either consciously or subconsciously—men are often harder to reach, or we didn't put for the time or effort to do so. As a consequence, more and more men begin to see church as a place for women. Like it or not, men view church as irrelevant because much of what concerns men is either not addressed or when it is talked about it is done so in a feminine manner."¹⁹ The validity of this viewpoint lies in the fact that churches have not been able to effectively inspire men to become actively involved in the community of the church, therefore, without the presence of men involved, their overall concerns are not addressed. Attention must be given to traits and characteristics of men if we are expecting men to become involved in the church community. In speaking with Reverend Betty Hanna-

¹⁷Ibid., 16.

¹⁸Ibid., 42.

¹⁹Ibid., 47-48.

Witherspoon, pastor of Ebenezer African Methodist Episcopal Church, Kansas City, she believes church events are geared to attract women with events like teas, luncheons, and various other ministries, and these activities do not encourage men to become active. In addition, she states, women of the church community must give men space to be men.

Mason further states that the issue with men not being involved is not merely a general population issue; it is actually an engagement issue. The church must focus on manhood as an essential to discipleship and the church must take on an active role in restoring the image of men through Jesus. The work must be beyond breakfasts and small events.²⁰ Mason offers a model for “Defeminizing the Church:”

- *Riskianity*. Many portraits of Jesus in the church are of a weak Clark Kentish, mild mannered, soft man. We must be careful in the church to communicate that the same meek and lowly Jesus who humbled Himself to the will of His Father was also the temple cleanser on a rampage for His Father’s glory. We have erred too often for the former to the neglect of the latter, presenting a Jesus that women relate to most closely. He continues by drawing from David Murrow’s work regarding men being drawn to risk, challenge, and adventure, but these things are discouraged in the local setting of the church, which creates boredom for men.
- *Intellectual Engagement*. The mind of men must be challenged. Mason states that when he was an unbeliever, he was a Black Nationalist, believing Christianity to be the white man’s religion of anti-intellectualism. He viewed Christianity as intellectually anemic and overemotional. Sermons seemed simplistic, historically disconnected, theologically thin, and unattached to real life. He references 1 Peter 3:15 as a meaningful verse for him after his salvation experience. This verse revealed that Christianity must engage the mind as well as the heart: “Always be ready to give defense to anyone who ask you for a reason for the hope that is in you.” My thoughts on this support my general hypothesis from the perspective of proclamation. Preaching the Good News is a central part of reforming men in the community. Preaching, Mason continues, should present the biblical text in a way that is intellectually accurate, theologically stimulating and with masculine connection. I support Mason’s view that messages should engage men as well as the entire congregation intellectually, and should challenge and incite the increasing desire to know more about God through Jesus Christ.

²⁰Ibid., 161.

- *Making the Church Facility Masculine.* Many churches facilities are filled with pastel colors throughout the facility. This would be a deep inhibition for the men to feel at home in this environment. We must make the effort to make sure our buildings have a balance of masculinity.
- *Masculine Musicians.* Mason makes the point that effeminate musicians might be the most visible means by which men are turned off to the church. We must recognize the importance of who and what we are placing before God's people in leadership of the worship gathering. To ignore this could send the wrong message to men about the church. Mason continues that Jesus is to be supremely exalted in the gathering of the saints; men's purpose in leadership is to point to Him, not signify social status and preference. He has heard men complain to him on numerous occasions on distractions in the form of attire, speech, and other chronic anthropocentrism.
- *Masculine Songs.* Much of what we sing can cause a struggle for men to be driven to worship. Songs like "hold me," "rock me I your arms," "you are beautiful," and "you are so sweet" may not appeal to many men. Insisting on these types of songs points to the ongoing over-feminizing of the church. Careful selection of songs is important in the effort of the church to engage men, reforming the community.
- *Godly Pastors.* The role of the pastor in the church is to lead, feed, know, care, protect and project. The pastor must be trustworthy, honest and fair with the people. They must lead their men in their development within the community of the church.²¹

Patrick Morley in his book, *No Man Left Behind*, cites statistics similar to the research already presented, stating of the 44 million men who profess faith in Christ, only an estimated 6 million men are involved in any kind of ongoing or intentional discipleship program. He questions if the church is doing a good job with these men that are present.²² Although this is the reality of many churches, as our efforts are always to bring in members, there are still men that do attend church that need to be the focus of the churches attention. Morley continues that this change will need to be initiated through

²¹Ibid., 162-175.

²²Patrick Morley, David Delk and Brett Clemmer, *No Man Left Behind: How to Build and Sustain a Thriving Disciple-Making Ministry for Every Man in Your Church* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2006), 34.

spiritual reforms, not social reforms.²³ This presents the church with using the strategy that we already possess in the Gospel. Morley articulates that men most desperately need the Gospel. The Gospel is the one system that really works—a system that helps men change the core affections of their hearts.²⁴

Morley supports that the process of helping men transition and reform spiritually is discipleship. Jesus did this and began this model for us when He gathered himself around twelve regular men and together they changed the world. After the Resurrection, Jesus states in Matthew 28, one of the most effective speeches ever delivered where he commissioned those who were His disciples, to now go and disciple others.²⁵ Morley then lists the best methods for making disciples as follows:

- *Preaching and Teaching.* Do not underestimate the power of the preached Word. God has called some to be pastors and teachers “to equip God’s people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ (Eph 4:12 NLT).
- *Small Groups.* Small groups are a dynamic way to build disciples. Bible studies, accountability groups, prayer groups, share groups, groups for men only, couples groups, home groups and office groups.
- *Private Study.* Men become disciples when they discover God in His Word. Morley states he has never known a single man whose life has changed in any significant way apart from the regular study of God’s Word. Encourage men to use private study time to memorize meaningful verses, pray, sing and meditate on God’s Word.
- *Christian Literature.* Morley quotes Puritan Richard Baxter, who said, “See that in every family there are some useful moving books, beside the Bible. If they have none, persuade them to buy some; if they are not able to buy them, give them some if you can. If you are not able yourself, get some gentleman, or other rich persons, that re ready to do good works, to do it.” Morley continues that God is capable of using a good book to get hold of men.

²³Ibid., 34.

²⁴Ibid., 43.

²⁵Ibid., 34-35.

- *Seminars and Conferences.* God is capable of reaping through a seminar in proportion to what the pastor has sown through his weekly work. It is not important that seminars often repeat things pastors have already shared. All that matters is God receives glory for men who come to know Jesus and strengthen the relationship.
- *Informal Discussions.* Some of the richest times of our lives are found “hanging out” with buddies. Going to lunch, riding motorcycles, talking theology with friends—God often orchestrates teachable moments to build into each other’s lives.
- *Leadership Training.* If you are serious about making disciples, you really should get some training.²⁶

Jawanza Kunjufu in his work, *Developing Strong Black Male Ministries*, suggest presenting images of the resurrected Jesus before the church instead of always showing a Crucified Jesus. Or at least present both images.²⁷ This image is more attracted to the masculinity of men. He also states that when teaching, specifically younger Black men, who feel the streets have the answer, we not only have to life up this resurrected Jesus and emphasize what He did at His sanctuary, we must also tell the whole truth of what other men did in both the Old Testament and New Testament when they were faced with adversity in their lives.²⁸ The lives of men like Moses, David, Joshua and Caleb, Gideon and others, can be encouraging with men at various points in their life. Kunjufu also suggests that the church should make a point to celebrate men, stating that the world cheers for me and too often the church does not.²⁹ He also suggests that if we are to have effective ministries for men that we need to consider developing a questionnaire for men to complete that would help develop and improve the ministry. If we are to become good

²⁶Ibid., 46-48.

²⁷Jawanza Kunjufu, *Developing Strong Black Male Ministries* (Chicago, IL: African American Images, 2006), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 21.

²⁸Ibid., 27.

²⁹Ibid., 65.

leaders we must be good listeners and good followers, being attentive to the needs of the men we lead. If men emphasize certain issues over others, then good leadership should yield and consider the needs of the membership.³⁰ Kunjufu also lists five major problems with ministries for men that we should consider:

- 1) *Lack of prayer.* The ministry will only move forward on its knees. Successful ministries are praying ministries. Appoint two or three men as prayer warriors of the ministry, and make sure they know how to pray.
- 2) *Led by one.* Effective ministries are based on a team approach rather than individuals running everything.
- 3) *Based only on activities and events.* You can burn out your men by having events after events after events. By being so event focused, there are few opportunities to form relationship because everyone is working nonstop.
- 4) *Based on random activities.* There should be some relationship between big events and ministering to the needs of men. Some churches measure success by the celebrity of the speaker, the swank hotel where the event was held, and the number of tickets that were sold. The question should be is there a relationship between the event and Monday night Bible study? What was the purpose? What were its goals and objectives? Develop a mission statement and a vision of the ministry.
- 5) *Based on methods.* What works for one church may not work for your church. You can get ideas from other ministries, but when it comes right down to it, do your own homework. Start with developing the questionnaire and have the men complete to see the direction of your ministry.³¹

Phil Downer is the editor of *Effective Men's Ministry*. In this book, there are several writings from various authors regarding men's ministry. Jack Hayford wrote a chapter regarding the pastor's role in men's ministry, stating that the pastor's involvement in ministry is crucial to its success. The pastor's role would be that of the one who will disciple and model as well as that of the chaplain-leader. This will call

³⁰Ibid., 76-77.

³¹Ibid., 78-80.

pastors to a new mind-set, as they will be summoned to a new place of manly honesty before God. Pastors must allow God to shape them as men if they will be capable of shepherding the next generation of men. Pastors must be willing to pour themselves into their men as they themselves open their hearts to share in their own struggles in growth.³² This is crucial in men's ministry and discipleship. Pastors and leaders must allow themselves to be transparent to a certain degree and honest before their men, which helps men deal with their own issues knowing that their pastoral leadership struggles in their faith journey as well.

Rick Kingham also provided input in the writing of Downer, which included building the atmosphere of worship in the local church. He states that men will be encouraged to worship God with all their hearts when they believe they can encounter the Lord in their local church communities.³³ He suggests steps, which will help leaders to encourage their men to worship:

- *Pray for the men of the church.* This included praying the the Spirit of God will draw their hearts into worship.
- *Make worship a topic of discussion and study.* Discuss worship in small focus groups, Bible studies, prayer breakfast fellowships. Many men lack general knowledge about worship and open discussions in this during these various gatherings will expose them to the significance of worship.
- *Teach men to worship as a way of life.* Men need to be brought to a place where their lifestyle is worship. Because of their limited understanding, they feel worship has been isolated to Sunday morning. Expose them to various forms of worship such as prayer, solitude, study, confession, and singing.
- *Create opportunities for men to worship in a safe environment.* Not everyone is comfortable with loud singing and participating expressively. A safe environment should be created where men can worship with other men.

³²Phil Downer and Patrick Morley, *Effective Men's Ministry: The Indispensable Toolkit for Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan, 2001), 55-56.

³³Ibid., 147.

- *Use music designed for men.* Find music that is in the range of most men, so they may feel more comfortable singing in music ranges they can reach.
- *Identify men in your church who have musical talent and give them opportunities to use their gifts.* It is encouraging to men to hear men sing and lead in worship. Allow God to use the men who are willing to explore this area.
- *Challenge the men who have caught the vision for worship to encourage other men to participate.* It is good if the men who are involved reach out to other men to include them in the fellowship. This should not only be done by the leader.
- *Make worship tapes and resources available to your men.* This allows the men to catch the vision for worship through experiencing it in their car, home or office. Organizations that minister to men have learned how valuable music is to the family.
- *Do not get discouraged.* Men quickly change, and dynamic atmospheres will not happen overnight, but it will happen as you establish a consistent, inspiring, open environment where God is glorified.³⁴

This model is appreciated for exposing men in the community to various forms of worship such as solitude, study and confession, as well as the worship tapes that should be shared with men to have them experience worship in the comfort of their cars, homes and office. This will allow them to focus on the lyrics of the music and experience the Lord in their own comfortable settings.

The final model from Downer's work is by Geoff Gorsuch regarding the encouragement of vital relationships with the men of the church community. If vital relationships among men are ignored, the ministry for men will not develop or grow. The model for creating vital relationships among men can be likened to the baseball diamond approach, where each base represents stages of development. This begins by stepping up to home plate declaring the desire to become more like Jesus. The progression to the

³⁴Ibid., 147-148.

other bases depends on our enthusiasm to open ourselves to other men.³⁵ The baseball diamond model includes the following:

- *First Base – Acquaintances.* Reaching first base in relationships with other men is acceptance. “Accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God” (Rom 15:7 NASB).
- *Second Base – Friendship.* At second base, relationships progress to the level of friendships. The focus is on encouragement, discussion, and learning how to resolve conflict. “Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing” (1 Thes 5:11 NASB).
- *Third Base – Brotherhood.* We round third base by teaching and exhorting one another. “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God” (Col 3:16 NASB).
- *Home Plate – Christlikeness.* The investment in the lives of men will pay off as they become servant leaders to their families, friends, communities and church.³⁶

This is a great model for developing true Christian fellowship and brotherhood in the church community among men. From this model, getting back to home plate is the goal, where every man within the community of the church is like Christ, involved with their families and church communities.

There is still hope to reform men in the church community. These models provide great examples to explore as ministries for men are implemented in my local church. Through preaching, teaching, small groups and intentional attention to the men that are currently attending, God will reform men to become a viable part of the church community.

³⁵Ibid., 149.

³⁶Ibid., 150-155.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

The interest in this project is the dilemma of the African American male in our society and especially within the context of the church community. The majority of men are not involved within the life of the church. In the context worship setting, the number of active African American women greatly outnumbers the active African American men. This is not only during the Sunday worship experience, but also in other church activities within the week; men are not represented in high numbers. The focus of this project specifically deals with the reformation of African American men in the church community. The project will focus on engaging African American men within the context to determine what could be done that would create a greater interest in becoming more involved within the life of the church.

This created interest must be genuine and based on the biblical truth of the Good News. The project is not intended to provide a gimmick to persuade African American males to become more involved, but to rely on the power and strength of the life of Christ to draw men into a deeper relationship, which will lead them into deeper involvement within the church community.

This theoretical section will focus on biblical, historical, and theological foundations. The connection from the historical foundation is based on the examination of the gender ratio of men to women historically within the worship community. The

connection from the biblical foundation is based on understanding that men have always been presently active within the work of God in humanity. Since the account of Genesis, men have always been included and not excluded. The connection from the theological foundation is based on the concepts of discipleship where men will follow the life of Jesus and help each other with following Christ throughout this life. This is the stage where we learn how to live like Christ. As men learn to follow Christ, they learn how Christ is the One who is able to see them through all the difficulties and issues they face in life.

Biblical Foundation

Old Testament Foundation

From a biblical perspective, men have always been included and active in the work of God in humanity. Biblically, men have never been absent, but always presently involved in the work of God since the beginning. The Book of Genesis makes clear the existence of God prior to anything or anyone else being present. Genesis 1:1 begins with God creating the heavens and the earth. Following this, God intentionally shapes and forms creation with specific detail. God with detailed precision operated in creation and after four days, God consciously created living creatures, on the waters, in the air and on the land. In that sixth day Genesis states God saying, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”¹ Human life alone is created in the image of God and has the special assignment to rule

¹Gn 1:26.

over the created order.² This marks the beginning of man participating in active work by God in humanity and from this time, men have been presently involved in the work of God. Man is the NIV rendering of 'ādām, which is used generically here for mankind, rather than individual Adam. Specifically, v. 27 indicates 'ādām is created with sexual distinctions, male and female. Thus by the term 'ādām all human life is said to be created in the image and likeness of God.³ Yet as we are aware of sexual distinctions regarding the creation of man and woman, it is clear that the male gender was present and was involved in the work of God. The scripture is clear that God worked in and through the male creation from this fifth day and throughout the plan of redemption.

Humanity has now taken an active role in the plan of God. When we move ahead to chapter three, Adam and Eve, man and woman, are placed in the garden with specific instructions from God, yet due to their rebellion, they failed to maintain the standard of obedience required by the instructions of God which resulted in the fall of humanity. However, the amazing aspect regarding the sequence of these events is found in verse 8 of this chapter, which reveals, “And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?”⁴ “In this question you is singular, since God is addressing the man.”⁵ The man is specifically being addressed because man is not in the position

²K. A. Mathews, *The New American Commentary, Genesis 1-11:26*, vol. 1a (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 160.

³Ibid.

⁴Gn 3:8–9.

⁵William David Reyburn and Euan McG Fry, *A Handbook on Genesis*, UBS Handbook Series (New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 1998), 87.

desired in his relationship with God. This question is one, which speaks to the expectation that Adam was not in the place God anticipated. This is not to say that the omniscient God experienced a moment of confusion, but it rather clarifies the shattered expectation that just occurred. Adam was hiding from God as the fellowship was now ruined. “The anthropomorphic description of God walking (*mithallēk*) in the garden suggests the enjoyment of fellowship between him and our first parents. Yet now the man and the woman are hiding from God in fear.”⁶ God was in perfect fellowship and enjoyed this relationship, yet now the hidden couple confirmed this fellowship was no longer in place. This broken relationship that currently exists in the text clearly is followed by revealing the first question asked of God was directed towards Adam, the man, saying “where are you?”

The scripture is specific stating the man and his wife hid; yet the question was directed to the man. This question by God is clearly addressed to Adam, not Eve. Both genders are represented in this experience and both share responsibility for their rebellion, yet when God asks the question, it is addressed to the male representative of humanity. As God enjoyed the fellowship shared, once fellowship was broken, it was God who initiated restoring the fractured relationship. Man was who God called out to, asking the question regarding not being where he is expected.

As we examine the presence of African American men in the context of the church community, we could suggest that the African American male is not in the place expected in their church communities. As the other foundations will clarify, the gender gap within the church context is alarming as men historically have not been actively

⁶Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, 239.

present within the church. As we see God asking the question in Genesis regarding the whereabouts of Adam, God continues to ask the question regarding the whereabouts of African American men in the context of the church community.

New Testament Foundation

In the Gospel of Mark 1:14, Mark placed the beginning of Jesus' ministry after the imprisonment of John, although he did not describe John's imprisonment and death until 6:14–29. The word Mark used (*paradidomi*) means to hand over and is used to refer to the betrayal and arrest of Jesus in 9:31; 10:33; 14:21, 41. Its use with reference to John suggests that his death foreshadowed that of Jesus. The use of the passive voice implies that what was done was in accordance with God's purpose.⁷ This implies the type of walk one will have with Jesus Christ, as it is a walk that will require you to lose your life. There is no other way to fulfill the purpose of God in life without losing your life. However, the question could be asked, how does one actually lose their life. This question is crucial because it is stated later in Mark 8, "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it."⁸ African American males have been subject to the losing of life since the days of slavery to the Civil Rights movement and into this current generation of hidden racism. It is critical to understand the losing of life, as it is required for the salvation of humanity. To lose your life is to surrender all that an individual has, and sacrificing this life for God through Jesus Christ. It is through this losing of the life that the African American male can

⁷James A. Brooks, *The New American Commentary*, vol. 23, *Mark* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 45-47.

⁸Mk 8:25.

realize his life is saved and there is purpose for him in the Kingdom of God. Socially and historically, African American men have already lost so much it could be suggested that they have lost enough.

Jesus began his ministry of service by proclaiming the Good News of God. This Good News is both from God and about God. It brings forgiveness, restoration, and new life.⁹ Forgiveness is the freeing of a person from guilt and its consequences, including punishment; usually as an act of favor, compassion, or love, with the aim of restoring a broken personal relationship. Redemption is the returning of something or someone to their original state. Through the redeeming work of Jesus Christ, both humanity and creation will eventually be restored.¹⁰ All of this leads to a new life and relationship with Jesus Christ. Although this is available to all of humanity, if anyone needs to hear the Good News of God's forgiveness, it is the African American man. No one needs restoration, which leads to new life like the African American man. In the historical foundations section there will be information that supports the suggestion that the African American man has been exposed to a difficult experience and is in desperate need to come into contact with the Good News of God through Jesus Christ, which will lead them to forgiveness, restoration and new life.

This news from God and about God is a drastic switch from what the African American man has been accustomed to hearing, as they have faced what could be interpreted as bad news in America. Many aspects that will prove this conclusion will be

⁹Rodney L. Cooper, *Holman New Testament Commentary, vol. 2, Mark* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 11.

¹⁰Martin H. Manser, *Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies* (London, UK: Martin Manser, 1999).

explored in the historical foundation portion of this project. This bad news attacks the morale and confidence of the African American man and he becomes desperate for the Good News of forgiveness, restoration, and new life. All of this is found in Jesus Christ, as He is the Good News. Yet this proclamation has not reached African American men effectively enough to cause them to respond in greater percentages to the news, and surrender their life completely to Jesus and follow the Christ.

Jesus Christ proclaimed the Good News from God and about God. If ever a man spoke God's truth with authority, it was Jesus Christ. It has been said that the scribes spoke from authorities but that Jesus spoke with authority.¹¹ Matthew 7:28-29 says, "When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law."¹² It perhaps could be this authority in which compelled the men to follow. When the presence of Jesus Christ's authority is present with the presentation of the Good News, this scripture supports the compelling response of humanity and for this case, African American men, to the call of Christ.

The verb is used of Jesus' betrayal by Judas (3:19), suggesting that Mark set up a parallel between John and Jesus' experiences (cf. 1:4, 14a). The passive voice without a stated agent implies that *God's* purpose was being fulfilled in John's arrest (cf. parallel to Jesus, 9:31; 14:18) and that the time for Jesus' ministry in Galilee had now come (cf. comments on 9:11-13).¹³ The gender gap shows African American men are not

¹¹Mk 1:12.

¹²Mt 7:28-29.

¹³John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck and Dallas Theological Seminary, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), Mk 1:14.

represented will in the church community. Mark 1:15 say, “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!”¹⁴ The word translated time means a favorable, opportune, or significant time as opposed to mere chronology. Here, Mark referred to the time appointed by God for the fulfillment of his promises. Jesus claimed that the kingdom, which to most Jews seemed far in the future, had drawn near with his appearance.¹⁵ Current society indicates that the African American male is in a state where they need to respond to the favorable Good News. This is a opportune time for a repositioning of African American males in their church communities and families.

The phrase the time has come shows the exact timing of God. Jesus was saying that the critical moment in history had arrived. God was about to act decisively by bringing redemption and restoration to his people through his servant, Jesus.¹⁶ The critical moment in God’s history had arrived, God through Jesus Christ called men to service. In our churches, statistics show that men are not as actively involved in the life of their church communities.

The message was that the kingdom of God is near. The kingdom of God was central to Jesus’ teaching. The only way into that kingdom is to repent and believe. John had already been preaching for people to repent. Here, Jesus added the word believe. Only through repentance from their sinfulness and belief in the Good News (the gospel of Jesus Christ) would they enter the kingdom. Jesus was presenting urgency about the nearness of God’s kingdom and the need to act decisively.¹⁷ The historical foundations

¹⁴Mk 1:15.

¹⁵Brooks, *Mark*, 47.

¹⁶Cooper, *Mark*, 11.

¹⁷Ibid., 11-12.

section will show that for the African American man, there is a need to act decisively and respond favorably to the call of Jesus Christ into a life of discipleship.

Our Lord's message was the Gospel of the kingdom of God, or the Gospel of God as some texts read. Most of the Jews read political revolution into the phrase kingdom of God, but that was not what Jesus had in mind. His kingdom has to do with His reign in the lives of His people; it is a spiritual realm and not a political organization.¹⁸ In order to reform the African American male within the church community, the African American male will need to allow the reign of Jesus Christ in his life and allow Christ to have complete control.

The only way for African American males to enter God's kingdom is by believing the Good News and being born again. This will initiate their position in the church community. The Gospel is called the gospel of God because it comes from God and brings us to God. It is the Gospel of the kingdom because faith in the Savior brings you into His kingdom. It is the Gospel of Jesus Christ because He is the heart of it; without His life, death, and resurrection, there would be no Good News. Jesus preached that people should repent (change their mind) and believe. It is because Jesus preached with authority, He was able to call men from their regular occupations and make them disciples.¹⁹ This is why preaching is so essential to the reformation of the African American male. The content of the preaching must compel them to change their minds and believe. "For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach

¹⁸Mk 1:12.

¹⁹Ibid.

Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength."²⁰ There must be preaching with authority and consistency from our pulpits and Christ crucified is the authority that needs to be preached to provide hope for restoration of African American males.

By beginning Jesus' ministry with this account in Mark 1:16, Mark showed that the disciples were qualified to be witnesses of his entire ministry. He showed the importance of discipleship. He showed the way in which all should respond to Jesus' summons: promptly and completely. He showed the inseparable relationship of discipleship and Christology and he showed that Jesus takes the initiative in making disciples: they do not seek him, but he seeks them.²¹ The restoration of African American males is a God based initiative through Jesus Christ because they are not excluded from the kingdom of God. There must be an intentional summons of the current church community to seek them out, preach the Good News with authority and to implement discipleship methods in their lives. Jesus took initiative in making disciples, which suggests that the current church community must take this initiative as well.

Jesus' task was to gather around him a community whom he could teach so they might be sharers of this Good News. After his resurrection, Jesus would commission his disciples to carry the gospel into all the world. He began the preparation of his disciples

²⁰1 Cor 1:21-25.

²¹Brooks, *Mark*, 48.

to carry out that commission. Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee.²² It is interesting that when Jesus decided to gather a community, He began specifically with the calling of men to discipleship. This was intentional. A lot of fishing took place at this lake and Jesus chose the place where men populated as he began this community. In order to begin reformation of the African American male, we must explore places where men are heavily populated to begin this reform.

In Mark 1:17, the writer indicates that Peter and Andrew left immediately to follow Jesus. To the ancient reader, the summons to follow Jesus was an extraordinary disruption in a person's life and it may have even seemed offensive. This was a calling to discipleship and this type of disruption would put the welfare of their families at risk.²³ Perhaps this type of threat of losing all is too risky for African American males, as they have already been subjected to such plight, which requires enough of an effort to overcome. To risk all and follow could be viewed as too much to ask for. This idea of following Jesus is frequent in the Gospel of Mark and denotes discipleship. It is the idea of responding to a summons and attachment to a person, the person of Jesus Christ. It is this attachment that requires the giving up of self that provides a risk that is sometimes difficult to accept. It is the acceptance of the authority of Jesus who will then become the example of the One we are to follow through this life. The purpose of the summons was to make the two fishermen; fishers of men.

In Mark 1:18, there is a sense of urgency of Simon and Andrew to respond. Mark showed the ideal response to the command of Jesus should be immediate. There is a cost

²²Cooper, *Mark*, 12.

²³Leander E. Keck, *The New Interpreter's Bible Vol. VIII, Matthew* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 539.

for immediate response though, for Simon and Andrew left lucrative business and families to follow Jesus.²⁴

Regardless of the cost, it is an urgent task that must continue to be impressed upon African American males and provide the purpose of the task of this calling. Jesus was calling Simon and Andrew to the urgent task of rescuing people from the impending judgment implied by the coming of the kingdom in the person and work of Jesus. Leaving their nets showed their willingness to make a total commitment as disciples of the Christ.²⁵ This brings some responsibility back on African American males who are reformed in the community that it is their responsibility to be compelled and committed with the task of rescuing our men from the impending judgment that is coming.

In Mark 1:19-20, we see the same pattern duplicated to James son of Zebedee and his brother John. The process of discipleship must continue that once an individual is restored to a relationship with Christ, it becomes that person's responsibility to move and share the same Good News of Christ with others. Part of reforming the African American male to the church community, will have to explore other African American men going out and focusing on this population with the intention of restoring those outside into the community.

Historical Foundation

There are overwhelming amounts of statistical information, which would suggest that there are issues within our society that point to the absence of men and fathers in the lives of families. We have to spectacle that this impacts not only families and societies, but also the community of the church. Anthropologist Earnestine Friedl found that in

²⁴Brooks, *Mark*, 8.

²⁵Cooper, *Mark*, 12.

most preliterate societies, men were the keepers of religion. This includes the idea that men are responsible for controlling sacred or spiritual aspects of the universe and women the profane or secular aspects. It was men who had the role of passing faith to the next generation.²⁶ The following historical information will support and show that the keepers of Christianity have now shifted in recent history due to the greater number of women that occupy Christian church communities. As time progress we will find this gender gap increasing.

“In order to properly examine the presence of males in the worship community we must examine historically the gender ratio of men and women in the worship community. Beginning around the time of the American Revolution, Richard D. Shields states that fifty-nine percent of all new members from the years 1730 to 1769 were women. The figures for southern churches were the same. In the year 1792, ‘southern women outnumbered southern men in churches (65 to 35) though men outnumbered women in the general population (51:5 to 48:5).’ During the First Great Awakening, which began in 1792, women continued to dominate church life: ‘Ministers wrote that converts were usually young, most often between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five, either single or married but without children, and predominately female.’²⁷ Because the ratio between men and women during this period is closer in range makes the actual number that women outnumbered the men a greater proportion. The revivals such as the

²⁶David Murrow, *Why Men Don't Go to Church* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2005), Kindle Book.

²⁷Leon J. Podles, *The Church Impotent, The Feminization of Christianity* (Dallas, TX: Spence Publishing Company, 1999), 18.

First Great Awakening consistently started with women, and men were not only against the revivals, but also attempted to prevent wives and daughters from attending church.”²⁸

“Moving into Nineteenth Century America, we observe this continuing trend. Frances Trollope, mother of novelist Anthony Trollope, was appalled by the atmosphere that pervaded Protestantism and stated that she had never seen or read of any country where religion had such a strong hold upon the women, or a slighter hold upon men. Throughout the nineteenth century, women outnumbered men in churches by about two to one, which seems to have been the ratio even in the Second Great Awakening. In 1833, the Universalist Sebastian Streeter claimed that ‘Christian churches are composed of a great disproportion of females.’ In 1859, another minister, William Gage, said of the Unitarians, the church is almost without male members. Throughout the nineteenth century, and seemingly more so at the end than at the beginning, the church was for women. ‘The nineteenth century minister moved in a world of women. He preached mainly to women; he administered what sacraments he performed largely for women’ he worked not only for them but with them, in the mission and charity work of all kinds.”²⁹

“Observing Twentieth-Century America, not only do women appear to join churches more than men do, they are more active and loyal. Of Americans in the mid-1990s, George Barna writes, “Women are more than twice as likely to attend a church service during any given week. Women also are fifty percent more likely than men to say they are ‘religious’ and to state that they are ‘absolutely committed’ to the Christian faith.” Lyle E. Schaler, an authority on church growth, observes that ‘in 1952 the adult attenders on Sunday morning in the typical Methodist, Presbyterian, Episcopal, Lutheran,

²⁸Ibid., 18-19.

²⁹Ibid., 16-17.

Disciples, or Congregational worship services were approximately fifty-three percent female and forty-seven percent male, almost exactly the same as the distribution of the adult population. By 1986...these ratios were closer to sixty percent female and forty percent male with many congregations reporting a sixty-seven to thirty-seven or sixty-five to thirty-five ratio.”³⁰

As we continue to examine the gender differences within the church community, we will find that this current trend of men not representing an equal ratio within the church community continues. According to George Barna’s State of the Church Series 2011, the trend in this disproportion in gender remains. The statistics currently in the year 2011 reveals the proportion of men who attended a church service, other than a special event of funerals or weddings, during the week prior to their survey interview decreased from forty-two percent to thirty-six percent. Sunday school attendance declined by eight percentage points among men since 1991. Only one out of eight men presently attends such meetings in a typical week. The percentage of men who volunteer at a church during a typical week has slipped two percentage points since 1991 to its present level of eighteen percent. The proportion of un-churched men has grown by nine percentage points since 1991. Currently, an estimated thirty-nine percent of all men can be deemed un-churched—that is, having not attended a church event, other than a special service such as wedding or funeral in the past six months.³¹

There are other current facts regarding the gender issue regarding men within the active church community. Please note the following information:

³⁰Ibid., 11-12.

³¹George Barna, “20 Years of Surveys Show Key Differences in the Faith of America’s Men and Women,” accessed November 20, 2012, <http://www.barna.org/faith-spirituality/508-20-years-of-surveys-show-key-differences-in-the-faith-of-americas-men-and-women>.

- a. The typical congregation in the United States draws an adult crowd that is sixty-one percent female and thirty-nine percent male. This gender gap presently is representative of all age categories.
- b. There are thirteen million more adult women than men in America's church congregations on any given Sunday.
- c. Almost twenty-five percent of married, churchgoing women will worship without their husbands this Sunday.
- d. Midweek activities draw seventy to eighty percent female participants.
- e. The majority of church employees are women—the exception is ordained clergy, which is overwhelmingly male.
- f. Over seventy percent of the boys who are being raised in church will abandon it during their teens and twenties. A large percentage of these boys will never return.
- g. More than ninety percent of American men believe in god and five out of six call them Christians. However, only one out of six attend church on any given Sunday. The average man accepts the reality of Jesus Christ, but fails to see any value in going to church.
- h. Churches overseas report gender gaps of up to nine women for every adult man in attendance.
- i. Fewer than ten percent of U.S. churches are able to establish or maintain a vibrant men's ministry.³²

These statistics alone are considerably suggesting that currently this gender issue continues. The historical study of gender in the church supports that gender has always been an issue within the church community. In the past, the gap in the ratio has not been as substantial, but as the years advance, this gap in gender widens. While this information from the Barna group and other sources addresses the general gender gap across the population, we need to examine this same gender gap in the African American community. "As in the population overall, African-American men are significantly more

³²Church For Men, "Quick Facts," accessed November 20, 2012, <http://churchformen.com/men-and-church/where-are-the-men/>.

likely than women to be unaffiliated with any religion (sixteen percent versus nine percent). African-American women also stand out for their high level of religious commitment. More than eight-in-ten black women (eighty-four percent) say religion is very important to them, and roughly six-in-ten (fifty-nine percent) say they attend religious services at least once a week.”³³ The PEW Research Center’s Forum on Religion and Public Life determined that the African American community is more religious on a variety of measures than the United States population generally. However, this study also states that men are significantly more likely than women to claim no religious affiliation.³⁴

There is not much data information regarding specifically gender ratios within the African American church and this research will have to be conducted in the local setting to determine if this trend is consistent with the African American church. However, Robert M. Franklin states, “While many upwardly mobile Black congregations are experiencing surges of membership, there has been a mass exodus of the urban poor from the church, particularly young men. A generation ago, eighty percent of inner city males had some contact with church or Sunday school. But among the current generation of young men and boys an estimated sixty percent have no contact whatsoever with Christianity.”³⁵

³³The Pew Forum On Religion & Public Life, “A Religious Portrait of African-Americans,” accessed November 20, 2012, <http://www.pewforum.org/A-Religious-Portrait-of-African-Americans.aspx>.

³⁴Surviving Dating, “The Black Church: How Black Churches Keep African American Women Single and Lonely,” accessed November 21, 2012, <http://survivingdating.com/black-churches-how-black-churches-keep-african-american-women-single-and-alone>.

³⁵Christian Century, “Young Black Men and Church,” *Christian Century*, 111 no 14, Apr 27 1994: 439-440.

It was the studies of Franklin who noticed that women usually outnumbered men by substantial margins in the traditionally African American churches and he studied the exodus of African American men from our churches. He did research interviews with the African American population from local barbershops, as well as college graduates and found the following information:

Among the reasons the college-educated men cited for not going to church were: (1) the social-ethical teachings of Christianity encourage meekness and passivity, which are dysfunctional and dangerous qualities in a street-corner culture; (2) the character traits of the ideal Christian run counter to the macho persona; (3) most churches seemed to turn away from risky social action after the civil rights movement, expanding their internal operations instead; (4) churches, even when involved in politics, are not sufficiently radical and prophetic, choosing to support rather than challenge the political status quo; and (5) the sacred arts, icons, and religious symbols of the church reflect European cultural values and ignore the African presence in the bible.

The men at the barber shop, in turn, gave the following reasons: (1) worship services tend to be unnecessarily long, and leaders seem to be indifferent toward time management; (2) churches are too preoccupied with money and engage in heavy-handed fundraising that is often insensitive to poor people; and (3) churches seem to tolerate hypocrisy among important members and others—the VIPs—but seek to induce guilt among ordinary members, especially with regard to personal morality (alcohol consumption, smoking, gambling, and sexual behavior).³⁶

Robert M. Franklin's studies has targeted our African American males regarding their view of Christianity and the church and have provided some insight as to the increasing gender gap in church communities today. However, we also must address the social issues that invade the African American community, which also contribute to the gender gap within this community. An article in the New York Times indicates African American men in the United States face a far more dire condition than what we see in employment and education statistics and this condition has worsened in recent years. In fact, studies on Black men by experts at Columbia, Princeton, Harvard and other institutions, show that the increasing number of poorly educated African American men are disconnected from society at a larger degree than comparable to white and Hispanic men. In the inner cities of the country the studies suggest that African American men who

³⁶Robert M. Franklin, *Another Day's Journey: Black Churches Confronting the American Crisis* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), 90-91.

have finished high school are rare and legitimate jobs are limited because of this reality. Without proper education, it becomes difficult for men to obtain any type of employment, which would provide stable income for themselves or their families. If we examine the number of young Black men without jobs in 2000, sixty-five percent of Black male high school dropouts in their twenties were jobless and by 2004 that number increased to seventy-two percent.³⁷

These statistics appear to indicate a quiet and carefully planned genocide among African American men. If we examine the economic plight we will find that at comparable educational levels, African American men's income is sixty-seven percent of what Caucasian men earn. Caucasian men with high-school degrees are likely to earn the same income as African American men with college degrees. In addition, fifty-three percent of African American males between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-four are either unemployed or earn too little to lift a family of four from poverty.³⁸ These economic conditions also are leading to the issues with drugs in the African American community. The State of Black American in 1990 explained that the nature of the drug problem in the African American community is a concept of genocide, as illegal drugs that are smuggled into the United States make their way to the streets of inner-city Black neighborhoods in the form of crack cocaine.³⁹ These facts illustrate that the education, economic and drug condition has really worked against African American men and it has

³⁷Erik Eckholm, "Plight Deepens for Black Men, Studies Warn." *New York Times* (March 20, 2006). accessed December 14, 2012 http://www.nytimes.com/2006/03/20/national/20blackmen.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.

³⁸Black Star Project, "The Silent Genocide: Facts about the Deepening Plight of Black Men in America," accessed January 7, 2013 <http://www.blackstarproject.org/home/images/facts/deepeningplightblackmeninamerica.pdf>.

³⁹Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2010), 6.

aided in a larger problem as it reaches the range of men in the inner-city. This does not lead to good news in the African American community.

Michelle Alexander would suggest that the situation regarding drugs in the inner-city, has led to a new Jim Crow system in America. She states that studies support that all races use and sell illegal drugs at similar rates and actually white youths are more inclined to engage in crimes involving drugs than African Americans. However, if you observe the prison population, you will find an overwhelmingly number of African American men incarcerated for crimes relating to drugs. In some states, African American men have been admitted to prison on drug charges at rates twenty-five times greater than Caucasian men.⁴⁰

At these rates, Jim Crow also is a significant factor to the gender gap in the African American church community. It is this system that has taken our men out of their families, churches, and communities and has them sitting in a prison cell. Alexander argues that this system of mass incarceration works to trap African American men in a virtual and literal cage. The War on Drugs is the vehicle used as the bait through which extraordinary numbers of Black men are entrapped into the prison system. Drug operations and drug stings are conducted in poor areas where men have taken on the life of selling drugs which have been brought to their community. Once entrapped, they are denied any type of meaningful legal representation and are convinced and pressured to plead guilty whether they are guilty or not.⁴¹ This is where the system then has kept African American men unable to then become reformed within this system of Jim Crow laws. It has taken the men off the streets and put them in the prison system and these laws

⁴⁰Ibid., 7.

⁴¹Ibid., 180-81.

along with education, economic and the social issues are also contributing factors with limiting the number of African American men who are even available to be able to be exposed to the good news that is found in Jesus Christ.

Based on this information that a serious reformation is in order, which specifically targets African American men with the same efforts of entrapment that Alexander suggests the social system of the New Jim Crow has gone after these same individuals. Examining the way this gender gap is widening in our African American church communities, we must move with urgency to make necessary changes to improve the gender gap in our church communities. The belief is that if we do not act now and act decisively, conditions will not improve, and the mass exodus of African American men from our church communities will continue.

Theological Foundation

The following theological concepts found in the Gospel of Mark 1:14-20 will be examined as we attempt to reform the African American male in the church community: discipleship, preaching (keryugma), evangelism and mission.

The need to reform the African American male in the church community is supported by the definition of reform. To reform means to make changes in (something, especially an institution or practice) in order to improve it.⁴² As we look at the population of males and specifically African American males within the life of the church, we can determine that the disproportionate ratio between males and females will support the need for a reformation of this community, to improve the population of males that are actively involved in the church community.

⁴²Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson, *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 11th ed. (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004).

In the Gospel of Mark 1:14-20, one theological theme seen is discipleship. By definition, a disciple is someone who follows another person or another way of life and who submits himself to the discipline (teaching) of that leader or way.⁴³ The term disciple comes to us in English from a Latin root. Its basic meaning is learner or pupil. It was the task of the disciple to learn, study, and pass along the sayings and teachings of the master. It was during this process of learning which included a set meeting time and such pedagogical methods as question and answer, instruction, repetition, and memorization; the disciple would become increasingly devoted to the master and the master's teachings. In time, the disciple would likewise pass on the tradition to others.⁴⁴ Questions will need to be examined on whether the disproportionate ratio of males to females is because of the lack of discipleship within the church community where men are not being personally disciple by their pastors or males within the church.

In the New Testament, disciples do not seek out Jesus; rather, they answer when He calls them. Twelve disciples with different backgrounds are called into a special relationship with Jesus. According to Matthew and Mark, these twelve are the only disciples of Jesus. The Gospels describe how Jesus called the disciples to follow Him.⁴⁵ Many of the disciples came from various and different backgrounds and they all had the same assignment by Jesus which was to make disciples of the nations and to teach them what they were themselves taught by Jesus. What needs to be administered and examined as to whether churches are actually seeking out men or providing ministries which men

⁴³Walter A. Elwell and Philip Wesley Comfort, *Tyndale Bible Dictionary* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 384.

⁴⁴Robert B. Sloan, Jr., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. Chad Brand, Charles, Draper, Archie England et al. (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 425.

⁴⁵Dan Nässelqvist, "Disciple," In *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry and Lazarus Wentz (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2012).

will find engaging and where they will feel comfortable. The scripture in the Gospel of Mark is clear, that Jesus called men to a relationship with Him and disciple them into a deeper relationship.

Following another person as a disciple is a specific response to an explicit and definite call of discipleship under someone special and particular. This specific person must be engaging enough to call for such a following and must have something substantial to offer. This means that the call to follow must be clear and understandable. The disciple must understand the nature of this discipleship call. The leader of the disciple must provide the disciple something worth the following. The true challenge today becomes in getting men to respond to the call of being a disciple. It is suggested that this is difficult because discipleship involves men moving from relying on themselves to relying on someone else, or the person of Jesus Christ in this context. Discipleship from this perspective revolves around Jesus Christ.

From this perspective, the condition for discipleship today should include:

1. A disciple is called to walk with Christ; they profess faith in Jesus Christ.
2. A disciple is equipped to live like Christ; they are engaged in a process of spiritual growth and transformation.
3. A disciple is sent to work for Christ; they serve the Lord.⁴⁶

The ethics of the church community found expression in her discipleship. At salvation, a believer becomes a disciple, but discipleship is a walk that lasts the rest of one's life. Since each Christian must still deal with the presence of sin, his or her walk has successes and failures. For Jesus, the life of a disciple required total commitment (Lk

⁴⁶Patrick Morley, David Delk, and Brett Clemmer, *No Man Left Behind: How to Build and Sustain a Thriving Disciple-Making Ministry for Every Man in Your Church* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2006), 43-44.

9:23; 14:25–33). This was something the disciples struggled to learn, but Jesus made it clear the requirement was absolute. Nonetheless, Jesus dealt graciously with His followers' lapses. On numerous occasions the disciples failed to understand what Jesus was doing and He rebuked them, but He called them to learn and respond more appropriately the next time (8:24–25; 9:46–50, 51–55). The disciples were also willing to learn. They were committed to Christ, for which He commended them (18:28–30).⁴⁷

Discipleship is the central theme of Mark's Gospel. Of all the Gospels, Mark is at once the most frankly realistic in assessing the difficulties of discipleship and the most hopeful. Discipleship is costly (8:34–37; 12:44; 14:3–5), and persecution comes with the territory (10:30; 13:9–13). Mark was not blind to the disciples' misunderstandings (4:40; 6:52; 8:17, 33; 9:6; 10:38) and failures (10:13; 14:37, 43, 50, 71). Nevertheless, he expressed hope that beyond failure, those first disciples—and contemporary disciples—experience forgiveness (16:7) and fulfillment of Jesus' promises to be fishers of people (1:17, NRSV) and Spirit-inspired witnesses (13:11; compare 10:39). Mark's hope was grounded in Jesus, who both trusted in God's goodness and love for Him (1:11; 9:7; 10:18) and submitted to the necessity of His suffering and death as a prelude to His resurrection.⁴⁸ Mark's perspective is encouraging from the standpoint of hope in spite of disappointments that have become normal occurrences within the lives of African American men and humanity in general. There can be no means for leaning on the many

⁴⁷Roy B. Zuck, *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, electronic ed. (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1994), 156.

⁴⁸David S. Dockery, Trent C. Butler, Christopher L. Church et al., *Holman Bible Handbook* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 1992), 568.

failures one has experienced if the foundation of our forgiveness and redemption is found in the person of Jesus Christ.

Mark wrote to encourage Christians to persist in faithful discipleship, particularly in the crisis of persecution. Sometimes Mark encouraged perseverance through Jesus' sayings (8:34–38; 13:11). More often he encouraged faithful discipleship through the examples of his characters: *Jesus*, who by His exorcisms and healings triumphed over evil but who committed Himself to a life of humble service, suffering, and death; John the Baptizer, who was Jesus' forerunner in proclamation and death. Those first disciples, who left all to follow Jesus but who often, lacked faith and understanding and who failed Jesus through their rebuke, betrayal, denial, and abandonment.⁴⁹ We could suggest that our African American men have been subjected to the crisis of severe persecution, through many situations. Perhaps these situations have discouraged faithful discipleship among the African American male. There needs to be a refocus on the person of Jesus and His lifelong commitment to God and the will of God for His life, even to the point of death on the cross.

However, discipleship does not just occur without an event, which demands the proper reaction. Individuals are called to discipleship. What is it that causes the response or call to discipleship? If we examine the text in Mark, the call to discipleship did not occur until after the Good News of God was proclaimed or preached. The message that was preached was "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"⁵⁰ According to this, one should look at the theological

⁴⁹Christopher L. Church, "Mark," In *Holman Concise Bible Commentary*, ed. David S. Dockery (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), 429.

⁵⁰Mk 1:15.

perspective of kerygma and preaching, which means according to the transliteration in Greek means the content of what is preached; the message; closely connected with the act of preaching. Repentance comes, God saves those who believe (1 Cor 1:21), believers are strengthened, and confirmed (Rom 16:25) through the message preached (Mt 12:41; Lk 11:32). Foundational to preaching in the New Testament is utter dependence on the Spirit of God to accomplish its ends (1 Cor. 2:4-5). The message God uses is about the Good News of Jesus.⁵¹ This is essential because in order to initiate the effective response to discipleship, the message must be preached effectively. The content and quality of the Good News preached, compelled the men Simon, Andrew, James son of Zebedee and John to respond to the call of discipleship. The content is the things that are contained in something.⁵² What is contained in the message preached is what should compel men to respond to the Good News.

This raises the question regarding the content of preaching. Are men failing to respond to the preaching of the good news because there is something lacking in the content of preaching—the things contained in preaching? Are men not responding because sermons lack the substance that would lead them desire to know Jesus in a personal way and follow Christ in discipleship? Is there something missing in what African American churches hear from their pulpits that are discouraging our men to respond to the good news?

⁵¹Spencer Haygood, *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. Chad Brand, Charles Draper, Archie England et al. (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 980.

⁵²Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson, *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 11th ed. (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004).

The kerygma or proclamation which the written text works up out of oral tradition is not simply a series of more or less unified exhortations or observations about a state of affairs, human and/or divine, but is intimately involved with and hinges on the personal identity of Jesus, of his followers, and of the Father himself. The kerygma, the Good News, is not simply about Jesus. It is Jesus. “Your faith in me shall be shaken ... But after I am raised up, I will go to Galilee ahead of you” (14:27–28). And it involved not merely the thoughts and actions but the entire persons of those he came into contact with, directly or through his disciples. The kerygma was both public and intensely personal.⁵³

This suggests that the communication of the Good News should apply in a personal way to the hearers of the message. If preaching is not able to identify with men personally, this would cause resistance of an appropriate response of relationship and discipleship. Preaching must be taken seriously in preparation because it is through preaching the Good News that humanity comes to know Jesus Christ. “How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?”⁵⁴ The Gospel itself should provide people, both men and women, to come into relationship with Christ by the preached message.

Preaching did not emerge from the church’s experimentation with communication techniques. The church does not preach because preaching is thought to be a good idea or an effective technique. The sermon has not earned its place in Christian worship by proving its utility in comparison with other means of communication or aspects of worship. Rather, we preach because we have been commanded to preach.

⁵³*Semeia* 39, (1986): 17.

⁵⁴Rom 10:14.

Preaching is a commission—a charge. As Paul stated boldly, it is the task of the minister of the gospel to “preach the Word, ... in season and out of season” (2 Tm 4:2, NIV) begins with the humble acknowledgment that preaching is not a human invention but a gracious creation of God and a central part of His revealed will for the church. Furthermore, preaching is distinctively Christian in its origin and practice. Other religions may include teaching, or even public speech and calls to prayer. However, the preaching act is *sui generis*, a function of the church established by Jesus Christ.⁵⁵ We see this function established by Jesus Christ in the Gospel of Mark 1:14-20.

The church cannot but preach lest it deny its own identity and abdicate its ordained purpose. Preaching is communication, but not mere communication. It is human speech, but much more than speech. As Ian Pitt-Watson notes, preaching is not even “a kind of speech communication that happens to be about God.” Its ground, its goal, and its glory are all located in the sovereign will of God. The act of preaching brings forth a combination of exposition, testimony, exhortation, and teaching. Still, preaching cannot be reduced to any of these, or even to the sum total of its individual parts combined. Preaching is an inescapably theological act, for the preacher dares to speak of God and, in a very real sense, for God.⁵⁶ This expresses the components of preaching which provide meaningful, personal content, which should personally engage males and prompt them to respond to relationship with the Christ.

Evangelism is the active calling of people to respond to the message of grace and commit oneself to God in Jesus Christ. Evangelism is derived from the Greek word

⁵⁵ Michael Duduit, *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992), 13.

⁵⁶ Allen C. Myers, *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 847.

euangelion, meaning gospel, or Good News. The verbal forms of euangelizo, meaning to bring or to announce Good News occur some fifty-five times and are normally translated with the appropriate form of the word preach. Evangelism has to do with the proclamation of the message of Good News.⁵⁷ Due to the disproportionate ratio of men to women in our churches, it must be explored are African American men a focus of evangelism efforts in order reform the African American male in the church community.

Evangelism is a conscious attempt to share through word and deed, the Good News of Jesus Christ with others, so they can become a disciple of Christ. It requires the person who is making the conscious attempt in evangelism, to first know Christ personally. Effective communication of Christ through evangelism must come through personal experience with Christ. If Jesus Christ has not made a difference in an individual's life, if one is not striving to grow in Christ each day, then witnessing is a very difficult proposition. A deep love for God through Jesus Christ should be the compelling motive that moves an individual to witness. It is difficult to share the Gospel if it has not touched a person's life individually.⁵⁸

“Mission is one of the central themes that propel the narrative of scripture. To understand mission, one must consider its function within the entirety of the biblical narrative. This understanding begins with God, who creates (Gn 1), and it moves toward the formation of Yahweh's chosen people, Israel. As recipients of His covenant and commandments (Dt 5:1–6:9; Mk 12:28–34), Israel is charged by Yahweh with the

⁵⁷Bob Compton, In *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. Chad Brand, Charles Draper, Archie England et al. (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers 2003), 518.

⁵⁸Jeffrey Arnold and Stephanie Black, *The Big Book on Small Groups* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992).

mission to live as a blessing to the nations (Gn 12:1–3; Acts 1:7–8). Following Christ’s ascension, the Holy Spirit empowers Jesus’ followers to live their calling as missional participants with God (Acts 1:1–11). As such, the Church comes into being as a boundary crossing (Acts 15), reconciling people (2 Cor 5:11–21) who are charged with the task of seeking God’s will on earth (Mt 6:9–15).⁵⁹” Our churches must approach the mission seriously. Mission is the task on which God sends a person that God has called to introduce another group of people to salvation in Christ. In the Christian context the person sent is called a missionary. This person is charged with the task of spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ to people to whom he is sent.⁶⁰ As we examine our churches it appears from statistics that there are not many called to the mission of African American men. Many other groups are being targeted but our efforts in reaching men bring to question the desire to include men in the community. There is more work that needs to be completed in the mission of spreading the gospel to African American men.

As we look at the text in Mark 1:14-20, we find the elements of discipleship, preaching, evangelism, and mission. These theological concepts are essential in implementing strategies and methods for improving gender conditions in our church communities.

⁵⁹John D. Barry, Michael R. Grigoni, Michael S. Heiser et al., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2012).

⁶⁰Bob Compton, *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. Chad Brand, Charles Draper, Archie England et al. (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 1140.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

After reviewing my current context within my local church, First African Methodist Episcopal Church for the last few months, by observation, there is a lack of consistent participation in the church community by African American men. There are African American men who attend worship on a regular basis but most are not involved within the life of the church. Other areas of the church community are absent of these consistent men, who only attend Sunday morning worship. The majority of members in the ministries and organizations in the church are women. This reality created an intentional focus on men who are presently involved in any way within this context. When Jesus intentionally called men into discipleship and community, it was through this relationship that eventually led to the birth of Christianity. I believe that if the African American men in the First African Methodist Episcopal church community are engaged through preaching and intimate, intentional small focus groups, then they will learn to become more active within their church community, serving God and serving other African American men through Christian discipleship.

The hypothesis for this project was examined through testing the men of this local context in their natural and comfortable setting, using the method of qualitative research. In using this method, an attempt was made to develop an understanding on how to engage and reform men into becoming active members of the church community.

Information from the field experience was ascertained through assessment questionnaire interviews. This served the purpose of an informal interview with all participants in the control group to determine initial feelings of men in the church community. Pre-test and post-test surveys were distributed that determined the control groups understanding of their role in the church community prior to sermons preached and focus groups and after sermons preached and focus group.

The data that was compiled from the questionnaire assessment interviews, pre-test and post-test was evaluated along with observation on the behavior involved with the control group after testing was completed. The context associates assisted with the analysis of the personal observations to determine if the observations supported the project's hypothesis.

CHAPTER FIVE

FIELD EXPERIENCE

Jawanza Kunjufu examines the presence of African American men in church by asking the question in the title of his book, *Adam, Where Are You?* In his work, Kunjufu observes why most African American men do not attend churches with consistency. This scrutiny of men actively involved in the church is not recent news, nor is it limited to the African American community. Based on conversations with Pastor Chris Pinon, Lead Pastor at Life Quest Church and Reverend Mark Holland, Senior Pastor of Trinity Community Church, a United Methodist Congregation, they agree this scrutiny is not limited to the African American community. Both pastors lead predominantly multi-cultural congregations in the greater Kansas City area and both communicated a concern with men not being involved in the life of the church community.

This research focused on men in an African American congregation that are members and attend Sunday morning worship consistently. Research supports that our local church communities statistically are predominantly women. This has been documented earlier in this study. Women outnumber men on Sunday mornings, and in mostly all teaching ministries, outreach ministries, and fellowship activities. The concern with African American men, who are attending church consistently, is that there is not much involvement by these men in any other areas of the church community. When we consider the LORD calling Adam, in Genesis 3:9, God asked the whereabouts of Adam,

as he hid from the LORD. God knew Adam was hiding and was calling for Adam after the fall of humanity. God intentionally called for Adam, as he hid. As we consider the calling of the first disciples, Jesus called two men, Simon and Andrew to follow, which was a call to relationship and community. This type of relationship to community is a commitment to follow Jesus Christ in discipleship. It is in the call and subsequent discipleship that learners develop a deeper relationship with Jesus. The assignment shared by disciples of Jesus is to make others into disciples by sharing the Good News.

Commitment to Jesus involves community, and the life of the church is not limited to Sunday morning worship. It also extends to other areas such as the teaching ministries of Bible study and Sunday school. Serving others within the church community, serving the community where the local church is located and being a witness to the world so that the world will have the opportunity to know Jesus as Lord and Savior are also ways of serving.

First African Methodist Episcopal Church, in Kansas City, Kansas is the local setting for this research. This project is formed to challenge men who are already attending Sunday morning worship to become active in other aspects of the church community.

Collection of Data

Interview Questions

Question 1 – How often do you usually attend Sunday morning worship at First AME Church?

- a. Less than once a month: approximately 13.3 percent
- b. Once a month: 0.0 percent

- c. 2-3 times a month: approximately 26.7 percent
- d. Every Sunday: approximately 60.0 percent

Question 2 – Do you consider yourself to be a Christian?

- a. Yes: 100.0 percent
- b. No: 0.0 percent

Question 3 - How often do you usually attend or participate in other aspects of worship and service in the life of the church such as Bible Study, Prayer Meetings, monthly feedings and other community outreach efforts?

- a. I usually never attend other aspects of the life of the church: approximately 26.7 percent
- b. I usually attend other aspects of the life of the church 1-3 times a month: approximately 40.0 percent
- c. I usually attend other aspects of the life of the church 4 or more times a month: approximately 33.3 percent

Question 4 – Based on your observation during Sunday morning worship at your church and during other aspects of church such as Bible Study, Prayer Meetings and other community outreach efforts, would you state that the majority of members in attendance at your church are women or men?

- a. Women: approximately 86.7 percent
- b. Men: approximately 6.6 percent
- c. Not sure: approximately 6.6 percent

Question 5 – What prevents you from becoming more active in the life of the church? (Circle all that apply)

- a. My career/job prevents me from becoming more active: approximately 46.7 percent
- b. My family responsibilities prevent me from becoming more active: approximately 20.0 percent

- c. Sports, hobbies or other activities: 0.0 percent
- d. Age: 0.0 percent
- e. Health: approximately 6.7 percent
- f. Other reasons: responses noted below
- g. Requires too much time
- h. Caring for aging parents
- i. The life of the church is too much responsibility
- j. I have no desire to become more active: 0.0 percent
- k. Nothing prevents me from becoming more active: approximately 53.3 percent

Question 6 – Do you consider other aspects of the church life, such as Bible Study, Prayer Meeting and participating in outreach service ministries, important in your growth and development as a Christian disciple?

- a. Yes: 100.0 percent
- b. No: 0.0 percent

Question 7 – Do you understand what Christian discipleship means?

- a. Yes: 100.0 percent
- b. No: 0.0 percent

Question 8 – Do you believe Christian discipleship is an effective way of retaining African American Men in the church community?

- a. Yes: approximately 86.7 percent
- b. No: approximately 6.7 percent
- c. I do not know: approximately 6.7 percent

Question 9 – What could the local church do or implement in order to encourage men to become more involved in the life of the church community? Some responses are listed below:

- Survey and implement things men think are important - sports, building things together, party together, fishing trips, school courses together, computer, catering, wine tasting, equestrian classes, etc.
- Be open and understanding and not afraid of today's generation; go into relationship with respect and demand the same respect from them.
- Provide and assign duties and responsibilities
- Have men who are in the church encourage other men and share with them the truth about their walk with Christ (the victories and the less than positive outcomes)
- Consistency. Church leadership must be pure as the ends its trying to achieve
- Prayer, obedience, lead by example
- Men's chorus; financial seminars; men to boys workshops
- Ask and schedule activities for men
- Begin at an early age
- Have activities that attract them and include some spiritual activities around it
- Sponsor group activities and events and outings that men enjoy doing, perhaps couple those activities around Sunday worship

Question 10 – Do you believe the suggestions listed above are more effective than Christian discipleship?

- a. Yes: approximately 33.3 percent
- b. No: approximately 53.3 percent
- c. I do not know: approximately 6.7 percent
- d. Left blank: approximately 6.7 percent

Question 11 – Do you understand what it means to be a part of a church community?

- a. Yes: approximately 93.3 percent
- b. No: approximately 6.7 percent

Question 12 – Does the effectiveness of relevant, biblical preaching motivate you to become a better Christian disciple and become more involved in your church community?

- a. Yes: approximately 93.3 percent
- b. No: approximately 6.7 percent

Pre Survey Results

Question 1 – How has Bible Study/Sunday School in the local church help you develop in growing closer with Christ?

- Has allowed for a deeper understanding of various matters, discussions and participation
- Sunday school has been a learning place for me. It allows me time to solidify my thoughts with questions and answers for further growth.
- I have not been attending Bible Study/Sunday School
- I have not participated in Bible School or Sunday School. I do read the bible at home
- It has helped me to read my bible more. Forced me to make connection with how the word applies
- Bible study has strengthened my walk with Christ more than before when I was not attending
- In order to grow in Christ learning Bible doctrine is very important.

Question 2 – How would you explain your responsibility to serve in areas within your local church?

- Willing to serve and participate at all or any level
- As a man I feel we have an awesome responsibility to church and to our parishioners as well as to community that desperately needs especially black men to be leaders and set an example of what we feel God is looking for or ask us to do.
- In this area of my responsibility I have not responded as I should have. I believe I should be active throughout the week as well as Sunday.

- To serve in areas where needed.
- I am responsible to God to serve others in the local church to help build up the body of Christ
- Strong responsibilities, participating in several ministries.
- I am not a member of a local church presently.

Question 3 – How has recent sermons you’ve heard in church motivated you in any way to work harder in your relationship with Christ?

- Positive thoughts and understandings have been very helpful
- I particularly like sermons that motivate especially around black history times the stories of our forefathers and the legacy they have left us with is all inspiring.
- The last sermon inspired me to attend this meeting
- The content of the sermons have been very helpful to me in my walk with Christ
- Recent sermons I have heard are motivating me to try and get more men in the church and to talk to more men about how the church operates and explain areas of the church.
- Practically every Sunday I leave church renewed and encouraged to continue in my walk despite my faults. The sermons cause me to re-evaluate myself weekly.
- No answer

Question 4 – What has lately prevented you from becoming more involved in the church community at your local church?

- No specific reasons - I'll plan and need to become more active
- Nothing - what is disappointing is the lack of men wanting to do something/anything. Most of us are satisfied with the status quo and that is disappointing.
- I am going to commit to more involvement in the church community
- Nothing. I feel I'm more involved now especially since the death of my son.

- Nothing.
- The fact that people always rely on me all the time to do things that others are capable of doing.
- I do not have an excuse

Question 5 – How do you understand your duty as a Christian disciple?

- Good question. I'll need more time for a detailed response
- I believe my duty is to set and be an example for anyone that may look, even at a glance to someone striving to do the right thing. Walk as closely as possible in God's footsteps in order to affect some change in myself and others to be better.
- I am starting to realize I am to be active in all facets of the church community
- I am not sure I understand my duty as a Christian disciple
- My duty is to study the Word and teach the word to younger Christians and get them to go out and bring in their family and friends.
- To spread the word and reach out to lost souls. I understand that I must be a witness to others in my walk, so when I talk and reach out, others will listen and follow.
- I would say my duties are to learn Bible doctrine, think it and apply it to my daily life.

Question 6 – What do you feel needs to change in the local church for men to become more actively involved in Bible Study/Sunday School as well as various outreach ministries within your church?

- Assign topics for leadership discussion and active participation
- All need an active role something the group of men are counting on you to do. Bring talents, offer your house, find us a place; bring in Bible verse, we are waiting on your message etc. Kick us off with your prayer, your topic, etc.
- I don't know
- Pastor should just ask the men to take on certain projects.

- No answer
- I think a men's class works well. Maybe getting more men to take on leadership responsibilities in the church. Fellowshiping outside of the church with other men may influence others to attend church with other men, may influence others to attend church and different ministries because of their relationship and fellowship with other men.
- They must first understand who Christ is. If they do not develop that hunger or thirst they will not become involved.

Post Survey Results

Question 1 – How has Bible Study/Sunday School in the local church help you develop in growing closer with Christ?

- It has focused me to study more especially in the OT
- I have begun to use Bible Study as a vehicle to learn more about Christ and use it to grow closer.
- The Bible teaches us about the human condition and how God has worked in the lives of others. We also read/learn about the importance of a personal relationship with God.
- It has helped me to develop more in my knowledge of the bible and my daily walk. It allows me to grow closer with Christ because it is a guide to become more Christ-like in my walk and talk.
- Since the Bible is my only book of authorities and testimonies, it helps my tracing and verifying the truth for my everyday living.
- Helped me to develop study habits of the word of God.

Question 2 – How would you explain your responsibility to serve in areas within your local church?

- I serve to help build up the local church. I take my responsibility to serve serious. I feel if I don't do my job no one else will. I know that isn't true.
- I feel my responsibility to serve the church is required, be an actual part of the church service is a vital part.
- To support the church financially to keep it operating and to participate in facilitation non-members to join the family of God.

- I serve in many capacities within my local church. I act as a steward, lay member, music director, and youth advisor to our young people. My natural responsibilities are to act as a steward without the actual title. I am responsible for enhancing my skills as a spiritual leader.
- I have been faithfully endeavored to continue my studying Old/New Scriptures because to me as having pastored several churches over the years, I'm still learning with exceedingly humble faith in Christ Jesus...In His Divine Word...Amen
- I am to be of service to the Lord in whatever capacity I am called

Question 3 – How has recent sermons you’ve heard in church motivated you in any way to work harder in your relationship with Christ?

- Recent sermons have helped me to look at my relationship to other saints making me attempt to love others.
- Recently sermons that have stressed the need to read and learn the Word of God. This has been my motivation to spend my time at Bible Study
- Messages include praying for a clean heart and strengthening my prayer life, working to have a positive influence in a sin-sick world and drawing others to Christ.
- Recent sermons have been convicting and have caused me to reflect on my current actions vs what I should be doing in my Christian walk. The sermons motivate me weekly, and allow me to constantly think about my thoughts and actions as I strive to become a better Christian. Increased prayer and communication with Christ has enhanced as well.
- St. John, 5:39:15-17, gives me to know that Jesus when talking with the unbelieving Jews, says to them, “Search the Scriptures, and when praying to his Heavenly Father, on behalf of his disciples, he says, Sanctify them through thy truth, thy word is truth.” Amen!
- It has helped me to have confidence when I talk to others and witness of Jesus and salvation through Jesus Christ

Question 4 – What has lately prevented you from becoming more involved in the church community at your local church?

- Lack of interest of others
- Although I have not been as involved as I could have been, lately I am making more of a stronger attempt to be involved in my church community limitations due to job responsibility primarily and other conflicting interest

- Limitations due to job responsibility primarily and other conflicting interests
- The only thing preventing me to become more involved than I am is my well-being and I am currently pursuing my education.
- As a retired combat soldier and pastor, I am working two jobs as a private therapist and teaching weekend college courses
- Not applicable

Question 5 – How do you understand your duty as a Christian disciple?

- I have a responsibility to read and study the Word to carry the gospel to do what I can help the local church stay alive.
- My duty as a Christian disciple is to be of service to the people of my community and my church
- To spread the Word of God and show God's love in my daily walk while interacting with other people and at all times.
- My duty as a Christian disciple is to love and help bring people to Christ. Reaching out to the lost and educating others about Christ and His purpose. Trying to save as many souls as possible.
- To every woman and man who feel the need for religion, should surrender her or his soul to Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior with Christ's objective truth with peace and joy.
- Through the word of God and prayer

Question 6 – What do you feel needs to change in the local church for men to become more actively involved in Bible Study/Sunday School as well as various outreach ministries within your church?

- We have to keep reaching out hopefully we can bring them in one at a time.
- I feel that most men in the urban core may view the church as being feminine and are put off by the view of being weak and dependent on God.
- I'm frankly not sure. Offer tangible incentives that would attract more men.
- The only suggestion I can give, is to give men more responsibilities in the church. Reaching out personally to see where they might want to be more involved. Relating common interest to bible study lessons (i.e. sports events and bible study during timeouts and half time shows)

- Support our Pastor with all the love and support we can find daily; not just on Sunday morning, but with our prayers and gifts as God has given each one of us in the mighty name of Jesus Christ our Lord, In His Divine Words.
- Not really sure if anything needs to change; the desire must come within the individual

Analysis of Data

It was communicated to the members and congregation at First African Methodist Episcopal Church the information regarding this project focusing on reforming African American men in the church community. This information was shared at church business meetings as well as during Sunday worship service for consecutive weeks prior to beginning the testing phase. The adult male membership were requested to participate in this project by which the triangulation methods used would consist of interviews, attending small group Bible studies, two sermons, as well as completing surveys before the project began and at the conclusion of the project. At the time of this project, I had been the pastor for a little over a year and my focused interaction with the group of men in this context has been limited. The previous year, an attempt was made to encourage the men within the local context to become more involved in the life of their local church outside of Sunday morning worship. The limited interaction has been in the form of a monthly men's breakfast, which has been unsuccessful in causing the change hoped for regarding the men becoming more active within the community of the local church.

The majority of men who are currently attending Sunday morning worship are absent in the other aspects of the church community. In every active ministry and organization in this local church, male participation is under forty percent. Through observation at my church, there is a need for reforming men to understand their duty and responsibility in the life of the church community. The men were asked to to be present

for two sermons and two or three focus group studies. Following this a few random interviews would occur.

Triangulation Methods

Following the notification of the congregation, a meeting was held with those men who choose to participate. Written assessment questionnaires and pre-survey tests were distributed for the men to complete. These instruments would provide a better understanding of the male demographics in the church and how they were involved in the life of the church. The outline of the following six weeks was communicated to those in attendance.

Following this meeting the sermon outlines and lessons for the focus groups were created. The scriptural text for the first sermon was Genesis 3:9 where the LORD asked Adam the question, “Where are you?” The sermon highlighted the urgency regarding the absence of men in the community of the church, using the scriptural reference to suggest the Lord asked Adam this question when he hid from the Lord in the cool of the evening. This message attempted to open the awareness of the men regarding the Lord noticing their missing presence within the fellowship of the church community, calling them to return and renew their relationship with the LORD and the people who form the church.

The next Saturday evening, the first small group study took place. The scriptural focus for this small group study was Mark 1:14-20 which illustrates the beginning of Jesus’ ministry and the calling of the first disciples. The focus of this small group study was to reveal that at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, men were called into personal relationship and discipleship with Jesus. There was emphasis on Jesus specifically calling men to discipleship and the responsibility of discipleship.

Following the small group study, an evening of fellowship was planned in order to observe if fellowship would assist in the process of reforming men in the church community. The participants were invited to watch a college basketball game between the Kansas Jayhawks and Texas Longhorns. There were ten men that attended this evening of fellowship cheering for the Jayhawks. Three of the ten men attending were guests of members.

The next sermon was prepared and delivered from the scriptural text Exodus 6:1-9 which attempted to encourage men to understand that whatever their current conditions are with their families, careers, finances and other occurrences in life, the Lord, who is faithful, is capable to bring his children out and deliver them. Following this sermon, the writer held his final focus group study with the men. The post test was administered to the men separately, due to poor participation in the final focus group.

Pre Survey Data Analysis

Question 1 - How has Bible Study/Sunday School in the local church help you develop in growing closer with Christ?

The respondents to this survey support the importance to attend a teaching ministry as a means of developing a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ. However, approximately 29 percent of respondents stated that they do not attend teaching ministries. This reveals that although the respondents believe this to be important, the majority do not attend either Bible Study or Sunday School. This information, in addition to my observation of male attendance at Bible Study confirms the need reform of the men within the local church setting.

Question 2 - How would you explain your responsibility to serve in areas within your local church?

The men responding to this question understand responsibility to the local church as members and as men. Interesting enough that understanding has not, up to this point led men to actually becoming more active in the life and ministry of the church community. Currently active ministries have low participation from the men in this local context, once again supporting the need for reforming men in this local community.

Question 3 - How has recent sermons you've heard in church motivated you in any way to work harder in your relationship with Christ?

Respondents to this question answered favorably that preaching has been helpful and motivating in their personal relationship with Christ. However the preaching has not yet persuaded action to become active in the community of the church. My hope is this will evolve in time.

Question 4 - What has lately prevented you from becoming more involved in the church community at your local church?

An overwhelming majority of the men responding to this question provided no real reasons regarding their lack of involvement in the life of the church. The question was open ended and they could have responded with various reasons, but what is indicated from all respondents except for one, is that there is nothing preventing their involvement. Not their careers, families, other activities or outside interests. If nothing prevents this group of men, it seems that their lack of involvement is due to not wanting to be part of this local church. Reform is needed.

Question 5 - How do you understand your duty as a Christian disciple?

The language from the respondents fail to mention anything regarding a disciple as a learner or pupil. These answers fail to mention anything regarding walking with Christ, living like Christ and serving Christ, as outlined in Theological Foundations section of this project. Two respondents referenced studying the Word, which is part of discipleship, but failed to explain further. This supports a need to reform their thinking and understanding of discipleship and their responsibilities a disciple of Christ.

Question 6 - What do you feel needs to change in the local church for men to become more actively involved in Bible Study/Sunday School as well as various outreach ministries within your church?

Areas in which the men would be willing to participate were hoped for. The respondent answers vary widely. The respondent who suggests men should take on certain projects is similar to a comment given by Dr. Ralph West, Senior Pastor at The Church Without Walls in Houston, Texas. When asked how he dealt with men's ministry at his church, he commented, "Men are strange. I started asking them to do things, just kind of empowering them. Men do not do well with weekly Bible studies. They would rather paint a wall, cut a yard, or something like that. You can get them for maybe a few weeks for a bible study unless you turn it into kind of a fraternity. Men don't need a lot of fanfare, they just need to know you are there for them." Again, this confirms that this project is needed for this local context as well as for the men as a group. Respondent also replied the thought that a men's class or bible study would work well with this group.

Post Survey Data Analysis

Question 1 - How has Bible Study/Sunday School in the local church help you develop in growing closer with Christ?

A more favorable attitude regarding the teaching ministries was noted. This is after the two small group meetings and fellowship; it appeared the respondents grasped the greater need of the teaching ministries to develop them as disciples. Attendance in teaching ministries did not increase during the testing phase, however the language of the respondents has changed from the pre-survey. Attendance in Bible Study did increase after the testing phase.

Question 2 - How would you explain your responsibility to serve in areas within your local church?

The replies all indicate they feel responsibility to serve in greater capacity than merely Sunday morning worship.

Question 3 - How has recent sermons you've heard in church motivated you in any way to work harder in your relationship with Christ?

Post survey comments have not provided much of a different response from the pre-survey. Respondents express desire to study Scriptures and know God intimately through personal study, as they were inspired by recent sermons. Greater involvement in the church community by the men in this local setting has remained unchanged.

Question 4 - What has lately prevented you from becoming more involved in the church community at your local church?

The replies to this post survey question are interesting, based on the answers in the pre-survey. Here, few of the respondents express reasons such as career and educational goals as legitimate reasons why they are unable to become more involved in the church community. Reflecting on the pre-survey results to this same question, the overall feeling

was there were no particular reasons for lack of involvement. I reflected on the sermons and lessons presented during this phase, trying to determine what was communicated which could have caused this change in the reasons for lack of involvement in the church community. There was no information covered that I believe could have caused this.

Question 5 - How do you understand your duty as a Christian disciple?

Post survey answers to this questions, like the pre-survey questions, fail to use the language referring to disciple of learner or pupil. However, these answers are more descriptive in the duties of disciples, which include service, walking in the manner of Jesus and sharing the Good News. I was looking for the pupil and learner language in the answers and believes this needs to be stressed more to the group in the meetings that will occur in the future.

Question 6 - What do you feel needs to change in the local church for men to become more actively involved in Bible Study/Sunday School as well as various outreach ministries within your church?

Answers to this question vary. Only one respondent suggests providing more responsibilities for men to become involved and also mentioned bible study and fellowships that includes sports. Again, this causes the writer to reflect on the input given by Dr. Ralph West, as stated in the pre-survey analysis.

Outcome

Difficulty with testing this group completing the phase was experienced. Greater participation from the men in this congregation was desired. The primary purpose of this project was to initiate greater awareness to the gender gap that exists within this local context and to intentionally seek to reform the behavior of the African American men

within the local context. This research project was developed to challenge men to a closer walk with Jesus Christ and because of this renewed relationship reform would occur in the church community where men would become more responsible in other areas of the life of the church. The testing of this phase was implemented through preaching, men's focus groups, surveys and interviews. Once the testing phase concluded, outcomes were observed through the activity of men in the life of the church. This observation was discussed with a context associate who is also an active member within the local church community and has shared in the observation of this project effort.

The project was officially implemented in January 2014. The context of this local church community, according to the most recent membership roster, consisted of one hundred and fifty-one members, of which forty-eight are male, which is approximately 32 percent of the membership. Based on this male representation of forty-eight, sixteen are involved in ministries within this local congregation, this is approximately 33 percent of the male populace.

Of the active ministries operating in the church, six serve the membership of the local church community and one serves the extended community. These ministries consist of Steward Ministry, Trustee Ministry, Choir, Usher Ministry, Lay Organization, Security/Parking Ministry and Bundles of Love Diaper Outreach Ministry. Two weekly Bible study classes are also taught. The first class is on Wednesdays at Noon and the normal attendance is usually between nine and sixteen members that attend and none of these members were men prior to the testing. The Wednesday evening class has a normal attendance ranging from fifteen to twenty-five and of these members there are no more than three men that regularly attend, prior to testing. Based on the male populace of forty-

eight, eight men attend and participate in either the pastor's Bible study or adult Sunday school, which is approximately 15 percent of the male populace. Attendance was logged based on gender in the two Bible study classes, for ninety days prior to the testing phase in January 2014. The Noon class ranges in attendance between eight and fifteen people and during this ninety-day period prior to testing, zero men attended Noon Bible Study. The 6:00 P.M. evening Bible study class ranged in attendance between ten and twenty-four people and during this ninety-day period prior to January 2014, four men attended 6:00 P.M. Bible study.

The following paragraphs will explain the engagements and observations during the efforts of executing the testing of this populace:

Sermons – During the testing phase, one sermon focused specifically on the men. The content of this sermon provided statistical support for the lack of involvement of men within the church to actively become involved in ministries in the church setting. The intent was to challenge men to pursue leadership by becoming active participants in building the local church and the community where the church resides. Urgency was stressed that men start now, not tomorrow, to become active in spite of many distractions socially, with careers as well as with family relationships.

Man was formed in the image of God and this was intentional, as God had a purpose for man. This challenge attempted to engage the men first, and the congregation to act now. Also women were engaged to challenge and encourage men to fulfill their responsibility in their relationship with God and the church community.

The second sermon was delivered from Exodus 6:1-9, without the male specific focus and was delivered toward the general congregation. The men within the context

were encouraged that God is able to bring them through whatever the reality of their lives entail currently. This approach was used because the Good News of Jesus Christ should not need to be gender specific. The Gospel has the power to reach men and women, without the focus being specifically targeted towards one gender group. It is difficult to assess the effects of preaching among those who listen to sermons, however pre and post surveys support that sermons during this testing phase contributed to the attendance and also sparked desire towards a more active responsibility in the journey with Christ. Through observation, it is believed that men have been engaged and encouraged during the preaching of this phase by providing meaningful content, which would cause men to assume a greater level of responsibility within their church.

First Men's Focus Group – Ten men agreed to participate in the small men's focus group, which is approximately twenty-one percent of the male populace. Communication was distributed to all male members through announcements during worship services, e-mail, phone calls, and text messages, requesting participation. The focus of the first group session was on Mark 1:14-20, which focused on Jesus calling the first disciples. The lesson was taught verse-by-verse emphasizing the meaning of discipleship. Specific attention was given to the meaning of discipleship, how discipleship is initiated, discipleship revolving around Jesus Christ, and the lifetime walk of discipleship. These points were all taught within the context of the scriptural text. It was very challenging staying on the topic of the lesson, as the men in attendance constantly commented in areas outside of the topic. Focus seemed to be on questions and comments involving solutions on attracting more men to church as well as attracting young men and youth. Although these are very important items of discussion, the

intention was to inspire the men currently attending church to renewal through a closer relationship with Jesus Christ through discipleship that is focused on attending teaching ministries, prayer and service in the local church. Other topics of discussion that the first session included were issues within the denomination of African Methodism, which some men felt were problematic and actually discouraged men from attending. These issues ranged from heavy financial assessments that the local church pays to the denomination as well as the frequency of pastoral changes, especially in the last ten years. As the first group session ended, the next meeting date was confirmed as well as the information for review during the session. We decided that the men's group began the book study from *Manhood Restored: How the Gospel Makes Men Whole*, by Eric Mason. After reading the book, I believe it effectively ministered to this group of men as it dealt with topics of developing a deeper relationship with God through Jesus Christ, by allowing this relationship to transform and restore men with their family and churches. The group agreed to commit to this men's focus group beyond the testing phase of this project. It was decided the group would meet monthly and discuss the content of the book. The testing phase would only be the beginning of reforming the men in the local church community.

Men's Fellowship – Men were invited to an evening of fellowship during the Kansas College Basketball game, as many of the men are devoted fans of the Kansas Jayhawks. This format was used in another context, combining sports with devotional Bible studies for men. During this meeting, five men from the local context attended this evening of fellowship. In addition, one male who is a member of the current local context attended who had not attended the previous men's focus group. There were also two

other men who attended that were not members of the local church, but were friends of one of the members. This was a great evening of fellowship and bonding as brothers in Christ, as we enjoyed the Kansas game and also watching parts of other games. Outside of the opening prayer, and the blessing of food, there was no other type of Bible lesson, just an evening of fellowship. The writer had a bible study lesson planned, but decided during the fellowship not to teach the lesson during the evening. After reflecting more on this fellowship, the lesson should have been taught as a new experience for this group. The context associates who attended also agreed that it would have been a different experience for this group and agreed that it would have been good to attempt devotions during a sports fellowship. The evening concluded by reminding everyone of the next group study. More fellowships and Bible study for men during sporting games on television will be scheduled.

Second Men's Focus Group – The commitment from the group broke down during this meeting. We scheduled this meeting at the end of our last focus group, with everyone in attendance confirming their commitment and availability to attend. The group confirmed they prefer Saturday evenings as opposed to mornings as the time they would be available to meet. Communication reminders were distributed through e-mail as well as announcements during Sunday morning worship, confirming the date of the second focus group. Context associate also followed up through phone calls and text messages. On the day of the appointed meeting, in spite the communication and preparation, none of the men attended the meeting. This breakdown of the commitment from the men was unexpected.

At the time of this occurrence, discouragement loomed high. The event was viewed as a lack of desire and commitment on behalf of this group of men. Because of the many reminders that had been sent, the appearance was that everyone had activities or plans in which they preferred to participate, rather than fulfilling this commitment which is intended to strengthen them spiritually. However, after reflecting on this more, my point of view changed somewhat, as the lack of participation and commitment to complete this brief testing period strengthens my position that behavior needs to be reformed. The group determined the day and time, yet failed to attend on the date they selected. There is a need to reform men in this church community. Their failure to attend this specific meeting gave the conclusion that the church community is not their priority. This was discussed with a context associate that actually agreed with this conclusion surrounding this unattended meeting. This occurrence reinforced a desire to work on reforming ministry for men as a priority within the life of the local church setting with the effort to lead men into a meaningful relationship with Jesus Christ.

Getting this group to actually meet a second time actually took another month, as weather did not allow us to meet sooner, as we were still in the winter months. Post surveys were distributed through e-mail, requesting men to return at the last focus group meeting. When the men finally were able to meet again, only three men attended, and we studied our material to close this phase of testing. Post surveys were turned in from the context associate.

In addition to the triangulation data collected, the following observation have been made of the men in the local context:

Attendance in Bible Study – Noon and evening Bible study classes continue to be taught once a week. The class attendance remains constant with women continuing to populate in a greater proportion. However, one male has started consistently attending this class. This man was in the control group of men during the testing phase. He shared with the writer that through the sermons and discussions at the focus groups, he realized that he needed to know more about Christ and increase his understanding of scriptures. He is currently the only man attending this Noon Bible Study. Another man in the local congregation is attending the Evening Bible Study class weekly. He missed the small focus groups and fellowship, but was present during the sermons during the testing phase. He engages consistently in discussion during the Bible study and shared various testimonies regarding how God is moving in his life and he wants to grow in his spiritual life.

Prayer Meetings – Since the conclusion of the field-testing, prayer meetings have been instituted in the local church twice monthly. The local church has not historically held prayer meetings. Prior to this current attempt, two female members attended prayer meetings. This was held weekly on Tuesdays. There was a need to re-focus the church community in prayer and issued a new approach. Specific evenings were assigned where the church would commit to prayer. There was a request for ten to fifteen members including men to commit once a month towards this effort. At the time of this writing, the church community has met for prayer three times. The first night, approximately 30 percent of the members attending were men. The second night, approximately 32 percent of the members attended were men and at the last prayer meeting, approximately 36

percent of the members attended were men. This observation confirms tremendous improvement in the involvement of men in the community of this local church.

Vacation Bible School – This local church has combined with other area churches in its denomination for Vacation Bible School. This ministry event was held at Trinity African Methodist Episcopal Church this year. Twenty adult members registered to serve and attend and of those members, 45 percent were men.

Local and Outreach Ministries - The population of the local ministries within the church have remained the same, as no new members have joined these local ministries. There has been an increase in one man in the Diaper Outreach Ministry. This is the same man that has recently started attending the Evening Bible Study class. He has consistently over the last four months assisted the efforts of this outreach ministry to the community.

One of the context associates randomly asked members after service this question: “Since our Pastor has implemented his project on reforming men, have you noticed any change in their participation.” The information gathered from these members are as follows:

Brother James White, Trustee and member of First AME Church says, “Yes, there has been a change in the involvement of the men. I think it is Pastor’s way of pastoring. The Pastor’s approach. The Pastor’s involvement in the church. I think that it’s a number of things that center around the pastor being very positive, probably the most effective one.”

Sister Patricia Bayliss, Trustee and member of First AME Church says, “Yes I have noticed a change in the men. His leadership, honesty, spirit, and his knowledge of the Bible and what he’s supposed to do out in the community, gathering the men, saving young men. More young men, I mean a lot of more young men are coming to church.”

Sister Bessie Jackson, member of First AME Church says, “I think we’ve always had some outstanding men. As far as the programs, specifically, I’ve known about things they’ve had at different men’s homes, and you know, I’ve heard them say they’ve enjoyed it, and the spiritual gatherings. So those are the only things I’ve

heard about. As far as the men of the church, YES there are some strong men that work in the ministry, from the ministry outside with security to down where we have had functions where we fellowship over food, I've seen men working in that. So I'm not going to say I haven't seen them working, and it's not strong. I wish I knew more about specifically what he's doing. I would like to see more young men."

Brother Michael Sanders, member of First AME Church says, "I have actually seen little change in us men at church. Seemed like there have been a little change in the church as well. Seem like there are more men participating in things than before. Some things that he has asked for, they have done. Even though there are little, incremental steps, I believe it take incremental steps to take us a long way."

Sister Shirley Moore, member of First AME Church says, "Honestly, I have not paid much attention to what people have done. I think the men that have always participated, are still participating. Well now that I think about it, I have seen a couple men participate more than before have not done much, so it is thrilling to see that. So I take that back, I have seen men that in the past have not done anything participating more in church."

My assessment of the outcome of this testing phase is that slight reform has occurred in the involvement of the men in the local church community. The change has included slight increases in the populace of men participating in the various life of the community. The true test will have to be observed over a greater period of time. The efforts will continue in this local community to intentionally engage with the membership of men that attend this local church. I will commit to stay intentional with the group of men as we continue our efforts to include men in the plans of the church community.

CHAPTER SIX

REFLECTION, SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This journey has developed based on my lifetime experience where men have always played an active and positive role in my life. Having an earthly father who was present and active, as well as other men who were also father figures impressed upon me the importance of men in the life of family and community. This male leadership continued throughout my childhood and developed a passion for sports that exposed me to male leadership through various coaches. As I matured as a young adult, this male presence continued through professional mentors and spiritual leaders. A positive male presence has always been in my life. Caring but strong men have nurtured my entire life.

Even though I have an introverted personality, I always believed this would move me away from leadership. However, it has done the opposite and moved me into leadership. The men I experienced in life taught me something about leading men. As I grew into a young adult and into adulthood, I found myself deeply involved in the life of the church, however, there were a few other men who joined in working in the community in this capacity. I developed ministry for youth, young men and men, which began to shape me for what was in store for my future. After accepting the call to ministry and finally leaving corporate America two years after my ordination, I entered full time ministry. After two more years of extreme testing, I was assigned my first pastoral assignment in Kansas City, where I relocated my family. Six years after my first

pastoral assignment, I was assigned to First African Methodist Episcopal Church in Kansas City, Kansas. It is at this local context that I observed the lack of men active within the local church community.

I find my local context much like many churches in the community where women in worship and in the community of the church outnumber men. My efforts to engage the men in the past year consisted of a monthly breakfast that struggled to reform the culture of the community. The group mainly discussed a lot of what was wrong with the church, which inspired me to implement my project The Reformation of the African American Man in the Church Community. This local context has a total adult membership of one hundred and fifty-one members, and approximately 32 percent are men. Of this percentage, sixteen, or approximately 33 percent of those men attend Sunday morning worship. Based on this information, this project was implemented to reform the men in this local context. If churches intentionally engage through the preaching moment, small groups and other men driven ministries and activities, men will become more actively involved in the church community which will have a positive impact on the overall church.

This project began with an interview assessment of the male populace, as well as pre and post-test surveys, two small focus group studies, and a fellowship. After testing was completed, the data analysis revealed that the sample group was inconsistent with their commitment to complete this study, as each meeting revealed less men participating than the previous gathering even though all men committed to this testing phase. When the last small focus group was to meet, after waiting thirty minutes I decided that none of the men would be attending this meeting. I had to re-schedule this gathering and upon our

next meeting, only a few men attended. The failure to attend this last meeting was extremely frustrating because the men had agreed and committed to this date and time, yet failed to attend. After reflection, I concluded that even though the decline in the participation of the men occurred during this testing phase, this proves the urgency of intentionally focusing on the men of the community. My views of my own focus during this process evolved as well. In the past I would have become extremely frustrated at the lack of male participation in the church. This project has helped me to focus on consistent ministry for men and becoming more involved in their lives, attempting to draw them in deeper relationship with Jesus Christ.

There has been a slight increase in the number of men attending teaching ministries, prayer meeting, as well as the current outreach ministry. As we celebrated our Men's Day in June 2014, the man who led this effort shared that the men were more cooperative in planning this year as opposed to last year. This year the men formed their own Male Chorus, as last year, a choir was invited to share with us in our celebration due to lack of commitment to a Male Chorus. The forming of this choir indicated slight progress in the men becoming more engaged in the life of their church community. In addition, random interviews from members at First African Methodist Episcopal Church also confirmed that there is a slight change in the men who are active in the church. Reform is happening.

Based on the survey results and these observations, I have determined that through preaching, small focus groups and fellowship, the men of First African Methodist Episcopal Church has experienced reform into the church community. The reform has been small, but I believe that continued efforts will change the culture and environment

in the local church. The efforts will continue until every man is active within some aspect of the community of the local church.

My recommendations for this approach to continue to intentionally engage the men within this local church is outlined as follows:

Preaching. The Good News of Jesus Christ must be preached to men. The sermons do not have to be specifically directed to men, but my recommendation is that somewhere within the sermon, every preacher intentionally attempts to engage men somewhere within the preaching experience. This can be done through illustrations or through specific details in the text that may relate to men in some way. Men need to feel engaged during the preaching moment every week. For example, currently, we are facing the tragedy in Ferguson, Missouri, regarding the death of Michael Brown. As a preacher, my duty is to preach with the current situation of Brown in my mind because this current situation is very important to Black men and we need to include this angle in our prayerfully prepared sermons. Also, I will include developing platform where I can bring in guest preachers, evangelists and teachers that can address the men directly and specifically through men's breakfast and retreats. My plan will be to implement this in the coming year.

Small Group Fellowship/Teaching. Reflecting on the conversation with Dr. Ralph West during one of our peer group sessions, Dr. West stated that men do not do well with weekly Bible studies. I plan to develop a weekly model of fellowship with our men, which will occur on Thursday evenings, during the National Football League Season. During this time we will come together for a time of fellowship during the football games. At halftime, we will take time to have a 20-30 minute devotional Bible study.

This study could take place in the form of a book the group decides to study, or a traditional Bible study. I will also include information that men could be interested in such as finances and other things. My survey taken from this study suggested that some of our time together should include things that men enjoy. This will be an effort to implement this approach. This time together will give the group an opportunity to fellowship with each other, building bonds of brotherhood in Christ and also allow us to discuss biblical truths which will benefit our relationship with Jesus Christ. I have used this model of small groups in a previous context and it has proved to be successful in strengthening men's ministry, fellowship, and increase exposure to Jesus Christ, while viewing sporting events.

Intentional Pastoral Interference. In an interview with Dr. Vernon Howard, it was suggested that men become engaged in the church community when the leader is committed to them personally. He suggests that as pastors or leaders within the church, we need to do a better job forming real relationships with our men. I would suggest to add to my model of preaching and small group study, time where I can get to talk with the men on a more personal level, perhaps 10-15 minutes after service or after other meetings.

Private Study. I will encourage private study of the Bible for men and develop a simple plan that will guide and encourage daily Bible reading. This could perhaps also aid in discussion during our weekly gatherings.

Reform has started with the men at First African Methodist Episcopal Church in Kansas City, Kansas. I will continue to patiently work with the men we have until every man is reformed into the church community.

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